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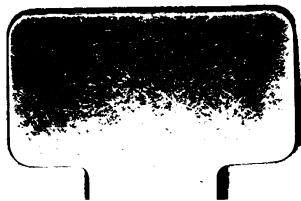
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STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

LONDON:
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STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

‘LADY AUDLEY’S SECRET’

ETC. ETC. ETC.

‘Egypt, thou knewst too well,
My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after; o'er my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou knewst; and that
Thy beak might from the bidding of the gods
Command me.’

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



LONDON
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1873

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STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

Book the First.

CHAPTER XII.

‘A man can have but one life and one death,
One heaven, one hell. Let me fulfil my fate.
Grant me my heaven now! Let me know you mine,
Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow,
Hold you and have you, and then die away,
If God please, with completion in my soul!’

MR. FORDE’s letters brought a more definite response than he had looked for. One of the chief members of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel wrote, strongly urging him to lend himself to that vast work. It was just such men as he who were wanted, and the need for such was great. A new mission to a land of more than Cimmerian darkness was on foot; the harvest was ready; had long been waiting for the sickle, but fitting labourers were few. The letter was

long and eloquent, and went home to Malcolm Forde's heart.

From the first, from that first hour in which the slumbering depths of his spirit had been stirred with a sudden rush of religious enthusiasm—like that strange ruffling of Siloam's still waters beneath the breath of God's angel—from that initial hour in which, beside the clay-cold corpse of her who should have been his wife, he dedicated his life to the service of his God, he had meant to do *something*—to make a name which should mark him out from the unnoted ranks of the Church—to accomplish a work which should be in itself the noblest monument that he could raise to the memory of his lost bride. Not in a quiet country parish could he find the fulness of his desires. It was something to have made a ripple upon this stagnant pool; something to have stirred the foul scum of indifference that had defiled these tideless waters. But having done this successfully, having awakened new life and vigour in this slumberous flock, he began to think in all earnestness that it was time for him to be moving forward. The life here was in no manner unpleasing to him; it was sweet rather, sweet in its utter peacefulness, and the fruition of all his present desires. He knew himself beloved and honoured; knew himself to have acquired

unwittingly the first place, and not the second, in the hearts and minds of this congregation. But all this was not enough to the man who had made St. Paul his typical churchman—to the man who boasted of himself as a soldier and servant of Christ. Very sweet was this pleasant resting-place; very dear the affection that greeted him on every side; the blushing cheeks and reverent eyes of school-children lifted to him as he went along the quiet street; the warm praises of men and women; the genial welcome that greeted him in every household; the hushed expectancy and upward look of rapt attention that marked his entrance to the pulpit. But precious though these things might be to him, they were not the accomplishment of his mission. It was as a pilgrim he had entered the Church; a teacher whose influence for good could not be used in too wide a field. Not in this smooth garden-ground could he find room for his labour; his soul yearned for the pathless forest, to stand with the pioneer's axe on his shoulder alone in the primeval wilderness, with a new world to conquer, a new race of men to gather into the fold of Christ.

This having been in his thoughts from the very first—a desire that had mingled with his dreams, sleeping and waking, from the beginning—it would

have been curiously inconsistent had he shrunk from its realisation now. And yet he sat for a long time with that letter in his hand, deliberating, with a painful perplexity, on the course which he should take. Nor did that lengthy reverie make an end of his deliberation. He who had been wont to decide all things swiftly (his life-path being so narrow a thread, leading straight to one given point, his scheme of existence hardly allowing room for irresolution) was now utterly at fault, tossed upon a sea of doubt, perplexed beyond measure.

Alas, almost unawares, that mathematically adjusted scheme of his existence had fallen out of gear: the wheels were clogged that had gone so smoothly, the machine no longer worked with that even swiftness which had made his life so easy. He was no longer able to concentrate all his thoughts and desires upon one point, but was dragged to this side and to that by contending influences. In a word, he had given himself a new idol. That idea of foreign service, of toiling for his Master in an untrodden world, of being able to say, 'This work is mine, and mine only!' which a little while ago had been to him so exhilarating a notion, had now lost its charm.

'Never to see her any more,' he said to himself; 'not even to know her fate! Could I endure that?

O, I know but too well that she is not worthy of my love, that she is not worthy to divide my heart with the service of my God, not worthy that for her sake I should be false to the vow that I made beside Alice Fraser's death-bed ; and yet I cannot tear my heart away from her. Sometimes I say to myself that this is not love at all, only a base earthly passion, a slavish worship of her beauty. Sometimes I half believe that I never truly loved before, that my affection for Alice was only a sublimated friendship, that the true passion is this, and this only.'

He thought of David, and that fatal hour in which the King of Israel, the chosen of the Lord, walked alone upon the housetop, and beheld the woman whose beauty was to be his ruin ; thought and wondered at that strange solemn story with its pathetic ending. Was he stronger or wiser than David, when for the magic of a lovely face he was ready to give his soul into bondage ?

For three days and three nights he abandoned himself to the demon of uncertainty ; for three days and three nights he wrestled with the devil, and Satan came to him in but too fair a guise, wearing the shape of the woman he loved. In the end he conquered, or believed that he had conquered. There was no immediate necessity for a decisive

reply to that letter, but he determined to accept the mission that had been offered him; and he began to make his arrangements with that view.

Having once made up his mind as to his future, it was of course his duty to communicate that fact to the Vicar without loss of time. So upon the first evening that he found himself at liberty, he walked out to the Vicarage to make this announcement. It was an evening in the middle of March—gray and cold, but calm withal, for the blusterous winds had spent their fury in the morning, and there was only a distant mysterious sound of fitful gusts sweeping across the moorland ever and anon, like the sighing of a discontented Titan. There was a dim line of primrose light still lingering behind the western edge of the hills when Malcolm Forde passed under the Bar, and out into the open country that lay beyond that ancient archway. He looked at the dim gray landscape with a sudden touch of sadness. How often had his eyes looked upon these familiar things without seeing them! The time might soon come when to remember this place, in its quiet English beauty, would be positive pain, just as it had been pain to him sometimes in this place to recall the mountains and lochs of his native land.

‘If I could but have lived here all the days of my

life with Elizabeth for my fellow worker and companion !' he thought. ' I can conceive no existence happier than that, if I could be satisfied with small things. But for a man who has set all his hopes on something higher, surely that would be a living death. I should be stifled in the languid sweetness of such an atmosphere.'

He thought of himself with a wife and children, his heart and mind filled with care for that dear household, all his desires, all his hopes, all his fears converging to that one centre—only the remnant of his intellectual power left for the service of his God.

' A man cannot serve two masters,' he said to himself. ' Sweet fancy, sweet dream of wife and home, I renounce you ! There are men enough in this world with the capacity for happiness. The men who are most needed are the men who can do without it.'

The Curate stood for some moments before the vicarage gate with a thoughtful air, but instead of opening it, walked slowly on along the waste border-land of unkempt turf that edged the high-road. Just at the last moment that new habit of indecision took hold of him again. He had hardly made up his mind what to say. He would find Mr. Luttrell with his daughters round him most likely. Elizabeth's clear eyes would peruse his face while he pronounced

his sentence of banishment. He was not quite prepared for this interview, and strolled on meditatively, in the cold gray twilight, wondering at his own unlikeness to himself.

‘Will she be sorry?’ he wondered, ‘just a little grieved to see me depart out of her life for ever? I remember when I spoke of my missionary schemes, that day I told her the story of my life, there was a shocked look in her face, as if the idea were dreadful to her. And then she began to talk of missionaries, with the air of a schoolgirl, as a low sort of people. She is such an unanswerable enigma. At times deluding one into a belief in her soul’s nobility—at other times showing herself frivolous, shallow, empty in brain and heart. Yet I think—after her own light fashion—she will be sorry for my going.’

Then arose before him the image of Lord Paulyn, and the memory of that Sunday luncheon at the Vicarage; the two faces turned towards each other—the man’s face ardent, enraptured—the girl’s glowing with a conscious pride in its loveliness; two faces that were of the earth, earthy—a brief scene which seemed like the prelude of a drama wherein he, Malcolm Forde, could have no part.

He bethought himself of that mere fragment of conversation he had overheard unawares on the

threshold of the vestry, a gush of girlish confidence, in which Elizabeth had boldly spoken of the Viscount as 'her slave.' He remembered that common talk in which the Hawleigh gossips had coupled Lord Paulyne's name with Elizabeth Luttrell's, and he thought, with a pang, that this was perhaps the future which awaited her. He thought of such a prospect with more than common pain, a pain in which selfish regret or jealousy had no part. He had heard enough of Lord Paulyne's career to know that the woman who married him would prepare for herself a doubtful future; in all likelihood a dark and stormy one.

'If I can get a minute's talk alone with her before I leave this place, I will warn her,' he said to himself; 'though Heaven knows, if her heart is set on this business, she is little likely to accept my warning.'

He wasted half-an-hour idling thus by the wayside, and in all that time had been thinking wholly of Elizabeth, instead of pondering on what he should say to her father. But about that there need be no difficulty. He had never yet found himself at a loss for words; and though Mr. Luttrell would doubtless be reluctant to lose so energetic a coadjutor, his affliction would hardly be overwhelming. There was always a fair supply of curates in the ecclesiastical

market, of various qualities ; indeed, the supply of this article was apt to be in excess of the demand.

It was past seven when Mr. Forde entered the Vicarage. The six-o'clock dinner was fairly over, the lamp lighted in the long low-ceiled drawing-room, the four girls grouped round the fire in their favourite attitudes—Elizabeth on her knees before the blaze, gazing into the heart of the fire, like a prophetess intent on reading auguries in the coals. She started to her feet when the servant announced Mr. Forde, but did not leave the hearth to greet him, though her three sisters crowded eagerly about him to give him reproachful welcome.

‘It is such an age since you have been near us,’ said Gertrude, almost piteously. ‘I cannot think what we have done to offend you.’

‘You must know that I have had no possible reason for being offended, dear Miss Luttrell,’ he answered cordially, but with his glance wandering uneasily towards that other figure rooted to the hearth. ‘Your house is only too pleasant, and I have had very little time for pleasure. I see your papa elsewhere ; and to come here is only another name for giving myself a holiday.’

Gertrude cast up her eyes in a kind of ecstasy.

‘What a saint you are !’ she exclaimed ; ‘and

what a privilege to feel your blessed influence guiding and directing one's feeble efforts ! I have felt myself almost miraculously assisted in my poor work since you have been with us, and I look back and remember my previous coldness with a shudder.'

' I have no consciousness of my saintship,' said Mr. Forde, with a little good-natured laugh, making very light of an elderly-young ladylike worship to which he was tolerably accustomed. ' On the contrary, I have a strong sense of being very human. But I am glad if I have been the source of enthusiasm in you, and trust that when I am no longer here to guide or inspire—quite unconsciously again—you will not be in any danger of falling away. But I do not fear that contingency—this with a somewhat severe glance in the direction of that figure by the hearth—' for I believe you are thoroughly in earnest. There is no such thing as earnestness without constancy.'

Elizabeth took up the challenge, and flashed defiance upon the challenger.

' O, Gertrude was born good !' she said. ' I wonder papa took the trouble to christen her. It is impossible that she could have been born in sin and a child of wrath, like the rest of us. She is never tired of church-going and district-visiting ; she has no intermittent fever of wickedness, as I have.'

‘When you are no longer here, dear Mr. Forde!’ cried Gertrude, deaf to her sister’s sneers, with her hands clasped, and her somewhat-faded gray eyes opened very wide, and gazing at the Curate with a wild surmise. ‘You surely do not mean that you are thinking of leaving us?’

‘I have been nearly two years at Hawleigh,’ he answered quietly; ‘longer than I intended to remain when I first came here—two very happy years; but I have awakened lately to the conviction that Hawleigh is not all the world, only a very pleasant corner of it; and that if I stamp my name upon nothing larger than a country parish, I shall scarcely have realised the idea with which I entered the Church.’

‘You have been offered a church in London perhaps,’ gasped Gertrude dolefully.

Diana and Blanche had seated themselves, and watched the little scene with a sympathetic air, regretful but not despairing. They would be very sorry to lose Mr. Forde, who was tall, and good-looking, and gentlemanlike, and had money of his own: but perhaps the vast ocean of curates might cast up at their feet even a more attractive specimen of that order, a man better adapted for picnics, and small tea-drinkings, and croquet.

‘ You are going out as a missionary,’ cried Elizabeth with conviction.

They all turned to look at her, startled by the certainty of her tone. She had not stirred from her position by the hearth, but stood there confronting them, calm as a statue, a curious contrast to the distressed Gertrude, who was wringing her hands feebly, and gazing at the Curate with a half-distracted air.

The single lamp stood on a distant table; but even in the doubtful light Mr. Forde fancied that Elizabeth’s face had grown suddenly pale.

‘ You are going out as a missionary,’ she repeated, as if she had by some subtle power of sympathy shared all his thoughts from the hour in which he briefly touched upon his views in his one confidential talk with her.

‘ You are good at guessing,’ he said. ‘ Yes, I am going.’

‘ O,’ cried Gertrude, ‘ it is like your apostolic nature to contemplate such self-sacrifice. But, O, dear Mr. Forde, consider your health,—and the natives.’

‘ I don’t think St. Paul ever gave much consideration to his health, or to the question of possible danger from the natives,’ answered Mr. Forde with his grave smile; ‘ and if you insist upon comparing me

with saints and apostles, you would at least expect me to be as regardless of any peril to myself as the numerous gentlemen who have spent the best part of their lives in this work.'

'Those lives may not have been so precious as yours, Mr. Forde.'

'Or they may have been much more precious. There are very few to regret me, should the chances of war be adverse.'

Again he stole a glance at Elizabeth. She stood firm as a rock, and was now not even looking his way. Her eyes were bent upon the decaying fire, with that customary prophetic look. She might have been trying to read his fate there.

'However,' he continued, 'the die is cast. I have arrived at the conviction that I am more wanted yonder, to dig and delve that rugged soil, than to idle among the delights of this flower-garden. And I came here this evening to announce my determination to Mr. Luttrell. Do you know if I shall find him in his study?'

'Papa has gone into the town, to the reading-room,' said Blanche.

'Then I can take my chance of finding him there,' said the Curate, preparing to depart.

'O, Mr. Forde, how unkind to be so anxious to

run away, when this is perhaps almost your last visit! . You must stop to tea, and you can tell us about your plans; how soon,' with a little choking noise, 'you really mean to leave us.'

'I will stop with much pleasure, if you like,' he answered, putting down his hat, which Gertrude took up with a reverent air, as if it had been a mitre, and removed to a convenient abiding place. 'As to my plans, they are somewhat vague as yet. I have little to tell beyond the one fact that I am going. Only I thought it due to Mr. Luttrell to give him the earliest information of that fact, insignificant as it may be.'

'It is not insignificant,' exclaimed Gertrude. 'Hawleigh never had such a gain or such a loss as you will have been to it. Will it be—' with another little choking interval, like a strangled semicolon—'very long before we lose you?'

'I do not know what you would call long. About a month, perhaps.'

'Only a month—only four more blessed Sundays! O, Mr. Forde, that is sudden!'

'Do not suppose that I am not sorry to go,' said Mr. Forde. 'I am very fond of Hawleigh. But that other work is a part of an old design. I have only been trying my strength here.'

'Only fluttering your wings like a young eagle

before soaring to the topmost mountain peaks,' exclaimed Gertrude with a little gush of poetry, raising her tearful eyes to the ceiling, in the midst of which burst the maid brought in the tea-tray, and Miss Luttrell seated herself to perform her duties in connection therewith, not without a consolatory pride in the silver tea-service. She was the kind of woman to whom even in the hour of despair these things are not utterly dust and ashes.

Elizabeth had seated herself in an arm-chair by the fire, on which her gaze was still gravely bent. She made no farther attempt to join in the conversation, but sat silent while Gertrude persecuted the Curate with questions about his future career, not consenting to be put off with vague or careless answers, but evincing an insatiable thirst for exact information upon every point.

Scarcely did Elizabeth lift her eyes from that mute contemplation of the fire when Mr. Forde carried her a cup of tea. She took it from him with a murmured acknowledgment, but did not look up at him, or give him any excuse for lingering near her. He was obliged to go back to his chair by the round table at the other end of the room, and sit in the full glare of the lamp, submitting himself meekly to Gertrude's cross-questioning. He bore this infliction perhaps

with a greater patience than he might otherwise have shown, for the sake of that quiet figure by the hearth. Against his better judgment, even although the plan of his life was fixed irrevocably, and Elizabeth Luttrell's image excluded from it, there was yet a pensive sweetness in her presence—her silent presence—the sense of being near her.

‘What does it matter if the pleasure is a foolish one?’ he thought: ‘it must needs be so brief.’

He stayed about an hour, sipping orange pekoe, and talking somewhat reluctantly of his hopes and views, for he was a man who deemed that in these things silence is golden. He tried to turn the thread of talk another way, but Gertrude would not be put off.

‘O, let us talk of you and your future, dear Mr. Forde,’ she exclaimed, with her accustomed air of pious rapture. ‘It will be such a comfort when you are gone to be able to think of you, and follow your footsteps on the map.’

The clock struck the half-hour after nine, and Mr. Luttrell had not yet appeared, so the Curate rose to depart, and went across to the hearthrug to bid Elizabeth good-night.

‘You had better say good-bye at the same time,’ said Diana. ‘Your visits are so few and far between

that I daresay Lizzie will have gone away before we see you again.'

'Gone away!'

'Yes; she is going to town in a fortnight, to stay with aunt Chevenix.'

'Indeed.' This in a disappointed tone, yet it could matter so little to him whither she went, when he was about to disconnect himself altogether from Hawleigh. Only he disapproved of aunt Chevenix in the abstract, and it was disagreeable to him to hear that the woman he had admired, and at times even believed in, was about to be subject to her influence.

'I believe you are half a Puritan at heart, Mr. Forde,' said Diana, 'and that you look upon all fashionable pleasures as criminal. I could read it in your face one day when auntie was holding forth upon her delectable land in the regions of Eaton-place.'

'I have no passion for that kind of thing, I admit,' answered the Curate. 'But I trust that your sister Elizabeth will pass safely through that and every other ordeal. If good wishes could insure her safety, mine are earnest enough to count for something.'

He shook hands with Elizabeth as he said this. The hand she gave him was very cold, and he fancied even that it trembled a little as his strong fingers

closed on it. Then followed Gertrude's effusive farewells. He would come to see them oftener, would he not, now that his hours among them were numbered ? Diana and Blanche were also effusive, but in a milder degree, having already been speculating upon the possible attributes of a new curate. In so dull a life as theirs even the agony of such a parting was a not unpleasing distraction, like that abscess in the cheek from which an Austrian archduchess derived amusement in her declining years.

While these farewells were being somewhat lengthily drawn out, Elizabeth slipped quietly from the room. Mr. Forde heard the flutter of her dress, and looked round for a moment, to discover that her place was vacant. How empty did the room seem to him without her !

He dragged himself away from the reluctant Gertrude at last, and felt not a little relieved when he found himself in the open air, under a windy sky ; the moon shining fitfully, with swift clouds scudding across her silvern face, the night winds sighing among the laurels on the leafy bank that shadowed the almost empty flower-border, where a fringe of daffodils showed pale in the moonlight. Mr. Forde walked slowly towards the gate, over the lawn on which he had condescended to foolish games of croquet in the

summers that were gone, thinking of Elizabeth, and her curious apathetic silence, and the almost death-like coldness of the hand that had touched his.

‘She is the strangest girl,’ he said to himself, ‘and there are moments when I am half tempted to think—’

He did not finish the thought even to himself, for looking up suddenly he beheld a figure standing before him on the edge of the lawn, a woman’s figure, with a shawl of fleecy whiteness, folded Arab-wise, and shrouding it almost from head to feet. Yet even thus muffled he knew the figure by its bearing; a loftier air than is common to modern young-lady-hood—something nearer akin to the untutored grace of an Indian princess.

‘Elizabeth! ’

‘Yes, Mr. Forde. I have come out here to ask you if it is true,—if you do really intend to fling away your life like that?’

‘There is no question of my flinging away my life,’ he answered quietly, yet strangely moved by her presence, by the smothered passion in her tone. ‘I shall be as much in the hands of God yonder as I am here.’

‘Of course,’ she answered in her reckless way, ‘God is with us everywhere, watching and judging

us. But He suffers human sacrifices, even in our day. It may be in the scheme of Providence that you should be eaten, or scalped, or tomahawked, or burnt alive by savages.'

'Be sure that if it is, the thing will happen.'

'O, that is your horrible Calvinistic doctrine ; almost as bad as a Turk's. But if you do not leave England you cannot fall into the hands of those dreadful savages.'

'And perhaps remain at home to be killed in a railway accident, or die of smallpox. I hardly think the savages would be worse ; and if I felt I had done any good among them, there would be a kind of glory in my death, which might take the sting out of its physical pain.'

'"The path of glory leads but to the grave,"' said Elizabeth gloomily. 'Don't go, Mr. Forde ! There are heathens enough to convert in England.'

'But if I feel that my vocation calls me yonder ?'

'It is a mere fancy. You were a soldier the other day, and cannot forget the old longing for foreign service.'

'Believe me, no ; I have considered this business with more deliberation than is usual to me. And I am quite convinced that my duty lies in that direction.'

‘A delusion ! You would be greater and more useful in England. Your countryman, Edward Irving, had once that fancy, I remember ; he had his ideal picture of a missionary’s life, and seriously thought of trying to realise it.’

‘Better for himself, perhaps, if he had achieved that early aim, than to be a world’s wonder for a few brief years, and die the dupe of a disordered brain.’

‘Don’t go, Mr. Forde !’ clasping her hands, and looking up at him piteously with her lovely eyes, so different from the seraphic gaze of poor Gertrude’s faded orbs. ‘I wish to Heaven I were eloquent, or knew how to plead and argue as some people do.’

‘You are only too eloquent ; your words go to my heart. For God’s sake, say no more !’

‘Yes, yes, I will say much more ; if I can touch you, if my words can penetrate your obstinate heart, you shall not go. I am pleading for Hawleigh, and all the people who love you, who have drawn their very faith and hope from you, as if your soul were a fountain of righteousness. I have a presentiment that if you go to those savage islands it will be to perish ; to lose your life for a vain dream. Stay here, and teach us to be good. We were half of us pagans till you came to us.’

They had walked on towards the gate while they were talking. They now stood close beside it; Elizabeth with one bare hand clasping the topmost bar, as if she meant to hinder the Curate's exit till she had extorted the recantation of his vow.

There was a little pause after her last speech. Malcolm Forde stood looking downward, thinking of what she had said; thinking of it with a passionate delight which was new and strange to his soul; a rapture which had been no element in his love of Alice Fraser. Suddenly he took the hand that hung loosely by Elizabeth's side.

'If I were weak enough, mad enough, to prefer my own happiness to the call of duty, I should stay here,' he said; 'you ought to know that.'

'I know nothing except that you have been hard and cruel to me always, in spite of all my feeble endeavours to please you,' answered the girl, with a faint touch of the pettishness common to undisciplined beauty.

'Your endeavours to please me!' he repeated. 'Could I think you valued my opinion? If I had imagined that; if I could have supposed, for one presumptuous moment, that you loved me—'

'If you could have supposed!' she cried impatiently. 'You must have known that I loved you, that

I have hated myself for loving you, that I hated you for not loving me.'

No swift answer came from his lips, but she was clasped in his arms, held close against his heart, his passionate heart, which had never beaten thus until this moment.

'My darling, my darling!' he said at last, in the lowest fondest tones that ever stole from a lover's lips. 'I never knew what passionate love meant till I knew you.'

'Not when you loved Alice Fraser?' she asked doubtfully.

'Not even for my sweet Alice. I loved her because she was as good as she was beautiful, because to love her seemed the nearest way to heaven. I love you even when you seemed to lead me away from heaven.'

'Because I am so wicked,' she said with a shade of bitterness.

'No, darling; only because you are not utterly perfect; because to love you is to be too fond of this sweet world, to be less eager for heaven. O my dearest, what a slave you can make of me! But beware of this passionate love which you have kindled in a heart that tried so hard to shut you out. It is jealous and exacting, tyrannic, perilous—perilous for

you and for me. It is of the earth, earthy. I love you too much for the sake of your beauty, too much for the magic of those lovely eyes that seem sweeter to me than summer starlight.'

'And if something were to happen to me that would spoil my good looks for ever, you would leave off loving me, I suppose?' she said.

'No, dearest, you would still be Elizabeth. There is a nameless, indefinable charm which would be left even if your beauty had perished.'

'Then you do not love me for the sake of my beauty?' she asked persistently, as if she were bent on plucking out the heart of his mystery.

'Not now, perhaps; but I fear it was that which won me. I never meant to love you, remember, Elizabeth. No battle was ever harder fought than mine against my own heart and you, nor ever a battle lost more ignominiously,' he added, with a faint sigh.

'Thank Heaven it is lost!' she said; 'not for my sake—I will not claim so unwilling a victim—but for your own. You will not go to the Antipodes to be eaten by savages?'

'Not if you offer me the supremest earthly happiness at home. I will try to do some good in my generation, and yet be happy. I will forget that I

ever had any higher aspiration than to tread the beaten tracks. I will try to be useful in my small way—at home.'

This half-regretfully, even with her bright head resting on his shoulder, her lovely eyes looking up at him with an almost worshipping fondness.

'And you will help me to lead a good life, will you not, Elizabeth?' he asked earnestly.

'I will be your slave,' she said, with a strange blending of scorn and pride—scorn of herself, intensest pride in him. 'I will be your dog, to fetch and carry; the veriest drudge in your parish work, if you like. I can fancy our life: in the dreariest parsonage that was ever built, a wild waste of marsh and fen round about us, a bleak straggling street of hovels for our town, not a decent habitation within ten miles of us, only the poor with their perpetual wants, and ailments, and afflictions. I can fancy all this, and yet my life would be spent in paradise—with you!'

Sweet fooling in which lovers delight! Doubly sweet to Malcolm Forde, to whom it was so new.

'My dearest and best,' he said, smiling at her enthusiasm, 'I will forgive you the marshes and fens; that is to say, we will not go out of our way to find them. But we will go wherever we are most wanted.'

‘To a nice manufacturing town, for instance, where there will be a perpetual odour of soap-boiling and size-making, and soot blowing in at all our windows.’

‘Perhaps to such a town, darling; but I would find you a nest beyond the odours of soap-boiling.’

‘Or if you have set your heart on a mission to the Dog-rib Indians, or the Maoris, or the Japanese, I will go with you. Why should I have less courage than that noble creature, Lady Baker? Indeed, on reflection, I think I should rather like such an adventurous existence. If one could go about in a yacht, now, and convert the heathen, it would be really nice.’

‘I will not risk a life so precious to me. No, dearest, we will be content with a narrower sphere. After all, perhaps a clergyman who has a wife may be of more use than a bachelor in an English parish; she can be such a valuable ally if she chooses, almost a second self.’

‘I will choose to be anything that you order me to be,’ she answered confidently.

‘But, O, my darling, are you really in earnest?’ he asked in his gravest tone, scrutinising the upturned face with a serious searching gaze. ‘For pity’s sake, Elizabeth, do not fool me! You have

told me that you are fitful and inconstant. If—if—this love, which fills my soul with such a fond delight, which changes the whole scheme of my existence in a moment,—if, on your part, it is only a brief fancy, born perhaps of the very idleness and emptiness of your life, let us forget every word that we have said. You can trust me, darling ; I shall not think less of you for being self-deluded. Consider in time whether it is possible for you to change ; whether the kind of life which you speak of so lightly would not really seem dismal and unendurable to you when you found yourself pledged to go on living it to the end of your days ; whether there is not in your heart some hankering for worldly pleasures and worldly triumphs : a longing which might grow into a regret when you had lost all hope of them for ever. To marry me is to accept a life that must be lived chiefly for others. My wife must be a lay sister of charity.'

‘Have I not told you that I will be your slave ?’ she answered ; and then withdrawing herself suddenly from his arms, ‘O, I begin to understand,’ she said, with a deeply wounded air ; ‘it is I who have been offering myself to you, not you to me, and you are trying to find a polite mode of rejection. Why are you not more candid ? Why not humiliate me at once by saying, “Really, Miss Luttrell, your readi-

ness to sacrifice yourself is most obliging, only I do not happen to want you?"?

'Elizabeth, you know that I love you with all my heart and mind.'

'Do you? No, I cannot believe it; I have wished it too much; no one ever obtained anything so ardently wished for. It is not in nature that I should be so happy.'

'If there is any happiness in being assured of my love, drink the draught freely. It is, and has been yours almost since the beginning of our acquaintance.'

'There is more than happiness, there is intoxication!' she answered in her fervent unmeasured fashion. 'Not because you are handsome,' she went on, with an arch smile; 'for in that respect I am superior to you. It was not your face that won me. I love you because you seem to me so much above all other men; because you have dominion over me, in fact. I did not think it could be so sweet to have a master.'

'Say, rather, a guide and counsellor, dearest. There shall be no question of dominion between us. I want your life to be as happy as mine will be in the possession of your love.'

'But I insist upon your being my master!' she

answered impetuously. ‘I am not a creature to be guided or counselled; see how little influence papa has ever exercised over me with his mild bewailings and lamentings, or Gertrude with her everlasting sermonising. Believe me, I must be commanded by a being stronger than myself. Even my love for you is slavish. See how little value I could have set upon my dignity as a woman when I came out here to-night to make my supplication to you. But I did not mean to betray myself. I only meant to plead for the people of Hawleigh. You will not think me too contemptible, will you, Malcolm?’

The name was half whispered. It was the first time she had ever pronounced it.

‘Contemptible!’ A lingering kiss upon the broad white brow made the rest of his answer.

How long this kind of talk might have lasted is an open question, but at this moment Elizabeth’s quick ear caught the sound of a footstep on the high-road.

‘It is papa, perhaps,’ she said nervously. ‘O, please go.’

‘If you wish it, darling. But I may tell him everything to-morrow, may I not?’

‘To-morrow! That is so very sudden.’

‘There can be no reason for delay, dearest. Of

course our marriage is an event in the future. I am not going to hasten that unduly. Though, as far as worldly matters go, I am in a position to marry to-morrow. But there should be no delay in letting your father know of our engagement.'

'I suppose not. Our engagement! How strange that sounds! Do you really mean it, or will you write me a little note to-morrow morning recalling your ill-advised expressions of to-night?'

'Such a note is more likely to come from you than from me. But one word, darling. What about this visit to Mrs. Chevenix? It can be put off, can it not, now?'

'I hardly think so; auntie has made all her preparations for me.'

'They cannot involve much.'

'She would be so disappointed, and papa so angry; and there are my expectations, you know. One cannot fly in the face of fortune.'

'My wife must be independent of expectations, dear. And London gaieties are not the best preparation for life in a parsonage among the fens.'

'Do you think not? I shall find out how hollow and empty such pleasures are, and learn to despise them.'

'That is according to circumstances. But as a

matter of personal feeling, I would rather you did not go.'

' I only wish it were possible to slip out of the engagement; but I don't think it is; aunt Chevenix is so easily offended.'

' Offend her then, dear, for once in the way.'

Elizabeth shook her head hopelessly. After the money that had been spent upon her dresses it would seem something worse than folly not to wear them. They might have served for her trousseau perhaps, but she doubted if so much flouncing and trimming on the garments of a country clergyman's wife would have satisfied Malcolm Forde's sense of the fitness of things. There was a white tulle ball dress dotted about with tea-roses, a masterpiece of Miss March's, which she thought of with a tender regretfulness. O, the dresses ought really to be worn; and what a pity to offend aunt Chevenix for nothing!

' Very well,' said Mr. Forde. ' I see my tyranny is not to begin yet awhile. If you must go, dear, you must. But it seems rather hard that our betrothal should be inaugurated by a separation.'

' It will only be for a few weeks. And I am not going till the end of the month.'

The footstep had approached and had passed the vicarage gate. It was not the step of Mr. Luttrell,

but of some bulky farmer walking briskly towards his homestead.

‘Good-night, dearest!’ said Malcolm Forde, suddenly awakened to the recollection that it was a cold March night, and that Elizabeth was beginning to shiver. ‘How inconsiderate of me to keep you standing in the open air so long. Shall I take you back to the hall-door?’

‘O, no; my sisters might see us, and wonder. I will run round by the orchard, and go in the back-way.’

‘Very well; dear. They shall have no ground for wonderment after to-morrow. Good-night.’

CHAPTER XIII.

‘For Destiny does not like
 To yield to men the helm,
And shoots his thoughts by hidden nerves
 Throughout the solid realm.
The patient Daemon sits
 With roses and a shroud;
He has his way, and deals his gifts—
 But ours is not allow’d.’

VERY little slumber came to the eyelids of Elizabeth that night. She had spent many a sleepless night of late ; nights of tossing to and fro, and weary longing for the late-coming dawn ; nights full of thought and wonder about the dim strange future, and what it held for her ; nights full of visions of triumphs and pleasures to come, or of sad longing for one dearer delight which was never to be hers—the love of that one man whom she loved.

Very different were her thoughts and visions to-night. He loved her. The one unspeakable blessing which she had for a long time deemed unattainable had dropped into her lap. He loved her, and she

had given herself to him for ever and ever. No more vague dreams of the triumphs that were to be won by her beauty, no more half-childish imaginings of pleasures and glories awaiting her in the world she knew not. On the very threshold of that dazzling region, just when success seemed certainty, Love closed the gate, and she was to remain without, in the bleaker drearier world she knew, brightened only by that dear companionship.

She had told him that the most dismal home to which he could take her would be a paradise, if shared with him ; and she believed that it would be so. Yet being a creature made up of opposites, she could not let the old dream go without a pang.

‘From my very childhood I have fancied that something wonderful would happen to me, something as brilliant and unexpected as the fate of Cinderella : and it all ends by my marrying a curate !’ she said to herself half wonderingly. ‘But then he is not like the common herd of curates, he is not like the common herd of mankind. It is an honour to worship him.’

And then by and by she thought :

‘I wish I had been a Russian empress, and he my serf. What a delight to have chosen him from his base-born brotherhood, and placed him beside

me upon the throne ; to have recognised all that makes him noble, in spite of his surroundings ; to have been able to say, “ I give you my heart and soul, and all this northern world ! ”

An empress could afford to make a bad match. It was a bad match. Even with all the glamour of this new delight upon her, she did not attempt to disguise this fact.

‘ I am glad he has money of his own,’ she mused. ‘ We can at least have a nicely-furnished house—what a comfort to have modern furniture after our ancient rubbish ! —and silver like papa’s. And I dare-say Malcolm will give me money enough to dress nicely, in a simple parson’s-wifeish way. I shall have to work very hard in his parish, of course, but it will be for his sake, and that will sweeten everything.’

She thought of Lord Pauly, and smiled to herself at the idea of his disappointment. Now that she had plighted her faith to some one else she felt very sure that the Viscount had been desperately in love with her, and had only waited, with the insolence of rank and wealth, his own good time for telling her of his love. It would be not unamusing, if she met him in London, to lead him on a little, to the point of an offer even, and then crush him by the

information that she was 'engaged.' And it would be still more agreeable some day in the happy future, when she was Malcolm Forde's wife, to tell her husband how she had refused a coronet for his sake.

She remembered that foolish wager of her pearl necklace. Diana was welcome to the bauble, and even to any touch of spiteful triumph which she might feel in her sister's acceptance of so humble a destiny. 'But they can hardly crow over me if Lord Pauly makes me an offer, and I refuse him,' she said to herself.

Was she not utterly happy in the first flush of her victory, having won the thing she had longed for? Almost utterly, perhaps; but even with the intoxication of that delight there was mingled a vague notion that she had been foolish, that the world—her own small world—would laugh at her. She had carried her head so high, had protested, not once but a hundred times, that, come what come might, she would never throw herself away upon a curate. What a storm of anger and ridicule must she needs encounter from Mrs. Chevenix, whenever that worldly-wise matron should be informed of her infatuated conduct! That defiant spirit, which so often had flouted the Chevenix, quailed and shrunk to-night at

the thought of the stormy scene that was likely to follow such a revelation.

‘But surely I am the mistress of myself,’ she thought. ‘It is myself I am giving away. And papa is not up to his eyes in debt, or in danger of dying in a workhouse unless I make a rich marriage. And if I am a little better-looking than my sisters, and the sort of girl people say ought to make a success in life, is that any reason why I should not be happy my own way, unutterably happy with the man I love so dearly, and to be loved by whom is like the beginning of a new life?’

It will be seen therefore that even in the hour of victory Elizabeth was not unconscious of having thrown herself away. She had been miserable without Mr. Forde’s love; but she was quite aware of the price her devotion to him was to cost her. The phantasmal opera-box, and town-house, and country-seats, and carriages, and saddle-horses faded slowly from before her eyes, like a ghostly procession of this world’s brightest glories, melting for ever into shadow-land. The worldly half of her soul suffered a pang at parting with these pomps and vanities.

‘They do not constitute happiness, I know,’ she reflected; ‘but I have thought of them so long as

a part of my future life, that it does seem just a little difficult to imagine the future without them.'

And then she remembered the dark eyes looking down at hers ; the grave low voice speaking words of love, sweeter words than she had ever thought to hear from the lips of Malcolm Forde. She remembered these things, and the pomps and vanities seemed as nothing when weighed against them.

' Thank God that he loves me ! ' she said to herself. ' What do I care if other people are disappointed or malicious ? I will be happy my own way.'

In spite of this resolution she felt strangely nervous next morning at breakfast, when she met the family circle, about which there seemed somehow to be a lurking air of suspicion, though nobody could have reason to suspect. She had slipped quietly in from her nocturnal excursion, and had gone up to her own room unobserved ; whence she sent a message to the drawing-room by one of the servants, to the effect that she had a headache, and could not come down to prayers.

' I hope your headache is gone,' said Diana, with the lukewarm solicitude of a relative.

' Thanks ; yes, I think so.'

' A headache is scarcely a subject for thought,'

remarked Gertrude ; ' one has or one has not a head-ache.'

' There are such things as nervous headaches,' said Elizabeth carelessly.

' Which I have always regarded as another name for affectation,' replied Gertrude.

' But you're not eating a crumb of anything, Lizzie,' exclaimed Blanche ; ' and you're so pale, and have such a heavy look about the eyes.'

' I did not sleep much last night ; and as for breakfast, I have always considered it a most un-inviting meal—perpetual eggs, and rashers, and dry toast, and Dundee marmalade. Give me another cup of tea, please, Gerty ; I am feverishly thirsty. And I am sure, if we are on the subject of looks, I cannot congratulate you on your appearance this morning ; you look as if you had been crying half the night.'

Gertrude flushed crimson at this accusation.

' I do not deny that Mr. Forde's announcement of last night was a blow to me,' she said. ' We have worked so long together, and I had learnt to look upon him almost as a brother.'

Elizabeth smiled to herself as she looked into her tea-cup. She was wondering how Gertrude would like to look upon him quite as a brother ; that is to say, a brother-in-law.

‘The idea of his going out as a missionary!’ exclaimed Blanche, spreading marmalade on her bread-and-butter. ‘It sounds Low Church, somehow, to me.’

‘I wonder what his successor will be like?’ speculated Diana. ‘Good-looking and gentlemanlike, I trust.’

‘And not a horrid married man with a herd of brats,’ said the flippant Blanche.

‘Blanche, I do not consider it consistent either with Christian principles or the preservation of your health, to put marmalade on your bread-and-butter to such an extent as you are doing!’ said Gertrude, with a housekeeper’s eye to waste.

‘I suppose we shall see no more of Mr. Forde till just as he is going away, and then perhaps we shall only get his card with P.P.C. in the corner,’ remarked Diana listlessly. She had already begun to put Mr. Forde out of her mind, as a thing of the past.

Elizabeth smiled again, with bent head, a happy triumphant smile. The smile of a heart which held no regret for a possible coronet; a heart which was filled to the very brim with love for Malcolm Forde, and joyful pride for having won him. She was thinking how soon they were likely to see him again, and

how often. He was hers now ; her vassal. Yes, he, the saint, the demigod, had assumed an earthly bondage. She had talked, in her foolish childish rapture, of being his slave ; but she meant to make him hers.

'I wish I could get out of the visit to auntie, as he wishes,' she thought. 'If Blanche could go in my place, for instance. But my dresses wouldn't fit Blanche ; and perhaps it would be as well for me to see the world a little before I bid good-bye to it, drain the cup of pleasure to the dregs, and find out how vapid the draught is.'

This was an easy way of settling the question ; but the fact is that Elizabeth Luttrell, having looked forward during the last four years to the unknown delights of a London season, was hardly disposed to relinquish so much pleasure, even for the sake of the man she loved better than all the rest of the world. She was a girl who thought she had a right to obtain everything she wished for, and even to serve two masters if she pleased.

She appeared unusually restless during the interval between breakfast and luncheon ; wandered out into the garden and orchard, and came back to the house with her hair blown about by the bleak March wind ; sat down to the piano, when that instrument was

available, and sang a little, and played a little, in her usual desultory manner ; took up a book from the table, only to fling it down impatiently five minutes afterwards ; and every now and then went to the window, and stood looking absently across the lawn.

‘One would suppose you expected somebody, Lizzie,’ said Diana ; ‘you do fidget so abominably, and stare out of the window so continually.’

‘You may suppose it, if you like.’

‘Has Lord Paulyn come back to Ashcombe ?’

‘I know nothing of his lordship’s movements.’

‘Indeed, I thought he was about the only person in whom you were interested, and I began to think you had received private intelligence, and were on the watch for him.’

‘I am not on the watch for him, nor do I care if I never see him again.’

‘What a change ! But how about your wager in that case ?’

‘My wager ! what, the pearl necklace, you mean ? Of course you knew that was the merest nonsense.’

‘What ! are you going to back out of it ? I thought it was a serious challenge.’

‘Take the necklace, if you like. I don’t think I shall ever wear it, and I have other things of poor mamma’s.’

‘But does that mean that you confess yourself beaten—that you promised more than you feel yourself able to perform?’

‘Have it so, if you like. You put me in a passion that night, and I said anything, only to annoy you. But I shall never be Lord Pauly’s wife.’

‘What a death-blow for poor auntie! She had set her heart upon having a niece in the Peerage. Her Debrett would have opened of its own accord—like the book Thackeray speaks of—at the article Pauly.’

The sisters were dawdling over their luncheon, when they heard a footstep on the gravel, and anon a ring at the hall-door. Blanche, the agile, dashed to a window in time to recognise the visitor.

‘Now, whoever do you suppose it is, girls?’ she cried. ‘Guess!’

Nobody appeared able to solve the enigma, although Elizabeth’s fast-beating heart told her the visitor’s name.

‘Mr. Forde!’ cried Blanche.

‘He has come to tell papa, no doubt,’ said Gertrude, taking a hasty survey of the table, to see that the mid-day meal made a respectable appearance, and then going straightway to the dining-room door, to intercept the visitor. ‘Papa is in his study, dear Mr.

Forde,' she said, shaking hands with him; 'but do come in first and have a little luncheon.—Blanche, ring for some fresh cutlets.'

'No, thank you, Miss Luttrell. I never take any luncheon. And I do particularly want to see the Vicar.'

'But I told him everything, and he is so grieved.'

'I don't think you can have told quite everything,' he answered, with a stolen look at Elizabeth, who was standing just within the doorway, and a little smile, 'and I hope we shall be able to overcome his grief. I will go to him at once, and look in upon you young ladies in the drawing-room afterwards.'

'Now, remember, we shall expect you,' said Gertrude, with her reverential air, hardly sorry that he had been proof against the temptation of the hot cutlet, which had been a somewhat speculative offer; since there might or might not be a section of the 'best end of the neck' in reserve in the larder.

'What delightful manners!' she said, as she went back to her place at the table; 'no assumption of goodness, no consciousness of possessing a loftier nature than the common herd.'

'Why, you wouldn't have him stalking about in a surplice, or expounding the Scriptures on the doorstep, would you, Gerty?' cried the irreverent Blanche.

‘I don’t see why sinners should be the only people with decent manners.’

‘Hold your tongue, child; you are incapable of understanding such a nature as his. You can gaze upon that saintly brow without one thrill of emotion.’

‘I certainly shouldn’t offer mutton-cutlets to people with saintly brows; I have more sense of the fitness of things,’ replied the uncrushable youngest.

Elizabeth said nothing. She was subject to long lapses of silence in the company of her sisters. They were so little worth the trouble of conversation. And now she had sweet thoughts that filled her mind while they were babbling,—a new wealth of happiness. He had come to speak to her father, to offer himself as her husband: and afterwards he would come to the drawing-room, and she would know the result.

‘Suppose papa should reject him,’ she thought with alarm. ‘I know how aunt Chevenix preached to him about Lord Paulyn, and the brilliant future before me. But, thank Heaven, papa is not mercenary; so long as he is not disappointed in his dinners, he is sure to take things easily.’

The four girls repaired to the drawing-room soon after this, and Gertrude skirmished round the room,

making a clearance of litter—books that had been flung down anywhere, work-baskets overturned, flying sheets of music ; and having done this, seated herself at her own particular little table, with its neatly-kept Dorcas basket, and began to tear calico. Elizabeth subsided into her favourite chair by the fire, and did nothing, after her wont—nothing, except look at the clock on the mantelpiece every now and then, wondering how long the interview would last.

‘What a time they are !’ Blanche exclaimed at last, with a yawn. ‘I should have thought, as papa knew all about it, they’d have made shorter work of the business.’

‘If you would employ yourself, Blanche, you would have less time for idle speculations of that kind,’ said Gertrude severely ; ‘but the whole weight of the Dorcas basket is allowed to fall on my shoulders.’

‘That’s the worst of being born too good for this world, my dear Gerty ; people are sure to impose upon you.’

The door was opened at this moment, and Mr. Forde came in, and crossed the room to Elizabeth’s place by the fire, and planted himself on the hearth-rug by her side, towering above her as she sat in her low chair, and looking down at her with a tender smile. The sisters stared at him wonderingly. There

was an air of appropriation in the manner of his greeting, grave and subdued as it was.

‘All has ended happily,’ he said in a low voice, as they shook hands. ‘You will meet with no opposition from your father.’

‘Have you told papa everything?’ asked Gertrude, watching the two with jealous eyes.

‘Everything.’

‘And he is very sorry, is he not?’

‘A little disappointed perhaps, but hardly sorry.’

‘Disappointed, yes, of course. He had hoped you would stay with us at least three years. How I wish he could have persuaded you to change your mind!’

‘Suppose I have changed my mind?’ said Mr. Forde, smiling at her anxiety. ‘Suppose I have found an influence powerful enough to make me forego my most cherished ambition?’

‘I don’t quite understand,’ faltered Gertrude, looking from him to Elizabeth with a blank dismayed look. ‘You seemed to have made up your mind so completely last night. What can have happened since then to make you waver?’

‘Wonderful things have happened to me since last night. All my thoughts and dreams have undergone a revolution. I have discovered that a life at home can be sweeter to me than I ever dreamed it

could be—till last night; and it must be my endeavour to find a useful career for myself at home.'

Gertrude grew deadly pale. Yes, she understood it all now. He was looking down at Elizabeth while he spoke—looking down at her with love unspeakable. It was clear enough now. Elizabeth was to have this priceless boon flung into her lap—Elizabeth, who had done nothing to deserve it.

'I want you to accept me as your brother, Gertrude,' said Mr. Forde; 'and you, Diana, and you, Blanche. I mean to do my best to supply the place of the brother you have never had.'

'There was the baby,' said Blanche, with a matter-of-fact air; 'such a poor wee thing!—christened Wilmot Chevenix Trelawney, and died half an hour afterwards. Such a waste of good family names!'

Mr. Forde held out his hand as he made this offer of brotherly affection, but no one took it. Diana gave a little laugh, and got up from her seat to look out of the window. Gertrude stood like a statue, looking at the Curate.

'You seem surprised by my news, Miss Luttrell,' he said at last, struck by her singular manner.

'I am more than surprised,' said Gertrude, 'after the things I have heard my sister say—after some things that you have said yourself, too. However, I

suppose one ought never to be surprised at anything in this world. I hope you may be happy, Mr. Forde; but I do not remember ever having heard of so unsuitable a match.'

She said this with calm deliberation, having just sufficient self-command to keep the tempest of angry feelings pent up in her breast for the moment; and having delivered herself of this opinion, left the room.

'It will be for us to find out that, won't it, Lizzie?' said the Curate, looking after her wonderingly. 'Your eldest sister hardly accepts our new relationship in so pleasant a spirit as I hoped she would have shown towards me.'

'Perhaps she wanted you for herself,' said Elizabeth, with a scornful laugh. 'She has made no secret of worshipping you.'

'Diana, Blanche, we are to be good friends, I hope?' This with a kind of appeal to the two others, who this time responded warmly enough.

'Believe me there is no one we could like better than you,' said Diana.

'I'm sure we doat upon you,' cried Blanche. 'I may say it now you are going to be my brother. But, you see, we were taken a little aback at first, for Elizabeth is the beauty of our family, and there has

been so much talk with aunt Chèvenix and one and another about the grand marriage she was to make ; so it does seem rather a come-down, you know.'

'Blanche !' exclaimed Elizabeth furiously.

'Don't I say that we all doat upon him ?' expostulated Blanche. 'But however good your family may be, you know, Mr. Forde, and however independent your position, and all that kind of thing, a curate isn't a viscount, you know ; and after Lord Paulyn's attentions—'

'Blanche ! If you don't hold your tongue—'

'Don't be angry with her,' pleaded Malcolm. 'I can forgive Lord Paulyn for having admired you, and your family for expecting all mankind to bow down and worship you, so long as you can forgive me for having made you disappoint them.'

Diana beheld her with wonder. Had worldly ambition, had a boldly-declared heartlessness come to so poor an end as this ? But when Diana and Blanche were alone together presently, Elizabeth having gone into the garden to see her lover off, with a rapid appropriation of her rights as his affanced, the younger sister shook her head sagely.

'How blind you must be, Di !' she said. 'I knew all about it ever so long ago. She was always madly in love with him. I have heard her say such things !'

‘I used to fancy she liked him a little once, but I thought Lord Paulyn had put all that out of her head, and that she had set her heart upon becoming a viscountess.’

‘Elizabeth is a mixture,’ said Blanche sententiously; ‘one moment the most mercenary being in the world, and the next like that classic party, with a name something like Sophia, ready to throw herself off a rock for love. It’ll be rather nice, though, to have Mr. Forde for a brother, won’t it, Di?’

‘It would have been nicer to have had a viscount,’ responded Diana.

In the bleak garden once more, the March winds buffeting them, the daffodils waving at their feet, the world a paradise.

‘Was papa very much surprised?’ inquired Elizabeth.

‘Yes, darling; more surprised than I had expected to find him, for he had evidently learned to consider Lord Paulyn almost your plighted lover.’

‘How absurd!’ cried the girl with a little toss of her head; ‘such an idea would never have entered papa’s mind of itself. He is not a person to have ideas. But aunt Chevenix talked such rubbish, just because Lord Paulyn came here a good deal. I sup-

pose this was about the only place he had to come to, on the days he didn't hunt.'

'I think there would be a few more houses open to him within a radius of ten miles, although he does not bear a very high character,' said Mr. Forde gravely.

'Perhaps. However, he seemed to like coming here,' replied Elizabeth carelessly. 'I am sorry he has not a good character, for he is not at all a bad-natured young man, although one is apt to get tired of his society after an hour or so. You are not going to be jealous of him, I hope?'

'I should be very jealous of any farther friendship, of any farther acquaintance even, between him and my future wife. He is not a good man, believe me, Elizabeth. There are things I cannot possibly tell you, but he is known to have led a bad life. I think you must know that I am not a collector of scandal, but his character is notorious.'

'You were jealous of him that Sunday at lunch, Malcolm,' she said in her childish way, clinging to his arm with a timid fondness. 'I saw you scowling at us, and I was prouder of your anger than I was of his admiration; and then you kept away, and I saw no more of you for ages, and I thought you a monster of coldness and cruelty.'

‘Yes, dear, I was savagely jealous ; and, O, my darling, promise me that there shall be no more intimacy between that man and you. I hate the idea of this visit to your aunt’s, for that reason above all. You will meet him in town, perhaps ; you will have aunt Chevenix by your side, dropping her worldly poison into your ear. Will you be deaf to all her arguments ? Will you be true and pure and noble in spite of her ?’

‘I will be nothing that you disapprove,’ said Elizabeth ; and then with a little burst of truthfulness she went on, ‘Do trust me, Malcolm. I only want just one little peep at the world before I bid it good-bye for ever—the world about which I have dreamed so much. It will be only for a few weeks.’

‘Very well, dear, I will trust you. If you could not pass scatheless through such an ordeal, you would be hardly worthy of an honest man’s love. My dearest treasure, I will hazard you. I think I can trust you, Elizabeth. But if you cannot come back to me pure and true, for God’s sake let me never look upon your face again.’

Book the Second.

CHAPTER I.

‘Two souls, alas, dwell in my breast: the one struggles to separate itself from the other. The one clings with obstinate fondness to the world, with organs like cramps of steel; the other lifts itself majestically from the mist to the realms of an exalted ancestry.’

A SUNNY afternoon in the second week of May, one of those brilliant spring days which cheat the dweller in cities, who has no indications of the year’s progress around and about him—no fields of newly-sprouting corn, or hedges where the blackthorn shows silvery-white above grassy banks dappled with violets and primroses—into the belief that summer is at hand. The citizen has no succession of field birds to serve for his time-keepers, but he hears canaries and piping bullfinches carolling in balconies, perhaps sees a flower-girl at a street-corner, and begins to think he is in the month of roses.

It seemed the month of roses in one small drawing-room in Eaton-place-south—a back drawing-room

and of the tiniest, with a fernery of dark green glass, artfully contrived to shed a dim religious light upon the chamber, and at the same time mask the view of an adjacent mews—the daintiest possible thing in the way of back drawing-rooms, furnished with chairs and dwarf couches of the *pouff* species, covered with cream-coloured cretonne and befrilled muslin ; a coffee-table or two in convenient corners ; the clock on the maroon-velvet-covered mantelpiece, a chubby Cupid in turquoise Sèvres beating a drum ; the candelabra, two other chubby blue bantlings struggling under their burden of wax-candles ; curtains of maroon velvet and old Flemish lace half screening the fire in the low steel grate. Ensconced in the most luxurious of the *pouffs*, with her feet on the tapestried fender-stool (a joint labour of the four Luttrell girls), and a large green fan between her face and the glow, sat Elizabeth Luttrell. She was not alone. Aunt Chevenix was writing letters at her davenport in the front drawing-room ; the swift flight of her quill pen might be heard ever and anon in the rearward chamber ; and Reginald Paulyne was sitting à *cheval* upon a smaller *pouff*, rocking himself softly to and fro, to the endangerment of the castors, as he discoursed.

‘Come now, Miss Luttrell, I want you to like Mrs. Cinqmars,’ he said, in an argumentative

tone. ‘She may not be quite what you’d call good style—’

‘I know very little of good or bad style,’ interrupted Elizabeth, in a somewhat contemptuous tone; ‘your world is so new to me. But certainly Mrs. Cinqmars has hardly what that French secretary of legation I went in to dinner with the other night called *l’air du faubourg*.’

‘Well, no, perhaps not ; dresses a little too much, and indulges rather too freely in slang, perhaps. But she’s the most kind-hearted creature in the world ; gives the best parties out—not your high-and-mighty nine-o’clock dinners, with cabinet ministers and ambassadors and foreign princelings, and so forth, but carpet dances, and acting charades, and impromptu suppers, and water parties. You go to her house to amuse yourself, in short, and not to do the civil to a lot of elderly fogies with orders at their button-holes, or to talk polities with some heavy swell whose name is always cropping up in the *Times* leaders.’

‘Who is Mr. Cinqmars?’ inquired Elizabeth with a supercilious air.

‘Henri du Châtelet de Cinqmars. Born a Belgian, of a French-Canadian father and an English mother—that’s his nationality. Made his money upon vari-

ous stock exchanges, and continues so to make it, only extending his operations now and then by buying up a steamboat line, or something in that way. A man who will burst up some of these days, no doubt, and pay ninepence or so in the pound ; but in the mean time he lives very decently at the rate of twenty thousand a year. He has literary proclivities, too, and is editor and proprietor of the *Ring*, a weekly paper in the sporting and theatrical interests, with a mild flavour of the *Age* and the *Satirist*, which you may or may not have seen.'

'I never look at newspapers,' said Elizabeth ; 'but pray why are you so anxious that I should like your Mrs. du Châtelet de Cinqmars ?' she asked, lowering her fan and gratifying the Viscount with an inquiring gaze from her brilliant eyes, more than ever brilliant since she had drunk the sparkling cup of London pleasures.

'Because she's the nicest person you could possibly have for a chaperon. Ah, of course, I know,' answering her glance in the direction of the busy letter-writer, whose substantial form was visible in the distance ; 'your aunt is a plucky old party, and can stand a good deal of knocking about for a veteran, but I think she'd knock under if she tried Mrs. Cinqmars' work : that blessed little woman shows up at

every race in Great Britain—from Pontefract to the Curragh—and at every regatta; and in the autumn you find her at Hombourg or Baden, gambling like old boots. Now, if you would only put yourself under her wing,' concluded Lord Paulyn persuasively, 'you'd stand some chance of seeing life.'

'Thank you very much; but I think I have seen enough in the last five weeks to last me for the remainder of my existence. Mrs. Cinqmars is a most good-natured person, no doubt; she called me "my dear" half an hour after I'd been introduced to her; and I won't be so rude as to say that she's not good style; but she's not my style, and I shouldn't care about knowing her more intimately. Besides, papa wants me at home, and I am really anxious to go back.'

She smiled to herself with a pensive smile; thinking what reason she had for this anxiety; thinking of the quiet country town, the gray old Norman church, with its wide aisles and ponderous square tower—the church along whose bare arched roof Malcolm Forde's deep voice echoed resonantly; thinking of that widely-different life, with its sluggish calm, and that it would be very sweet to go back to it, now that life at Hawleigh meant happy triumphant love, and Malcolm for her bond-slave.

But, in the mean time, this other and more mundane existence, with its picture-galleries, and gardens botanical or horticultural putting forth their first floral efforts, its dinners and déjeuners and kettle-drums and carpet dances, was something more than tolerable to the soul of Elizabeth. She had made a success in her aunt's circle, which was by no means a narrow one, and had received adulation enough to turn a stronger brain; had found the cup of pleasure filled to overflowing, and new worshippers everywhere she appeared. Had Mrs. Chevenix been a step or two higher on the nicely-graduated platform of society, Miss Luttrell might have been the belle of the season; as it was, people talked of her as the beautiful Miss Luttrell, a country clergyman's daughter, a mere nobody, but a nobody whom it was a solecism not to have met.

She accepted this homage with an air of calm indifference, something bordering even upon arrogance or superciliousness, which told well for her; but in her secret soul she absorbed the praises of mankind greedily.

She showed herself an adept in the art of flirtation, and had given so much apparent encouragement to Lord Paulyn, that, although she had been only five weeks in town, her engagement to that young

nobleman was already an established fact in the minds of people who had seen them together. But she was not the less constant to her absent lover; not the less eager for his brief but earnest letters. She looked forward to her future without a pang of regret—with rapturous anticipation, rather, of a little heaven upon earth with the man she adored. But she thought at the same time that her chosen husband was a peculiarly privileged being, and that he had need to rejoice with a measureless joy in having won so rare a prize.

‘If he could see the attention I receive here, he might think it almost strange that I should love him better than all the rest of the world,’ she said to herself.

‘Going back to Hawleigh!’ cried Lord Paulyn. aghast. ‘Why, you mustn’t dream of such a thing till after the Goodwood week! I have set my heart on showing you Goodwood.’

‘What is Goodwood?’ asked Elizabeth, thinking it might be some new kind of game—an improvement upon croquet perhaps; ‘and when is the Goodwood week?’

‘Towards the end of July.’

‘In July; that would never do. I must go home in a fortnight at the latest.’

‘Why, your aunt told me you were coming up for the season?’

‘My aunt had no right to say anything of the kind.’

‘O, but it’s positively absurd,’ exclaimed the Viscount, ‘going back just when there’ll be most people in town, and to such a dingy old hole as Hawleigh. What possible necessity can there be for your returning? Mr. Luttrell has your three sisters to take care of him. He’ll do well enough, I should think.’

‘O, yes, I daresay he will get on very well,’ said Elizabeth, thinking of another person who had written lately to inquire, rather seriously, whether the few weeks were not nearly over, whether she had not had ample time already for her brief survey of a world whose pomps and vanities she was going to renounce for ever, only thereby conforming to the pious promises of her godfathers and godmothers, which her own lips had ratified at her confirmation.

‘Come, now,’ said Lord Paulyn, returning to the charge, ‘do let me arrange an alliance between you and Mrs. Cinqmars. She’s just the kind of person with whom you could enjoy yourself. She has a box on the grand-stand at Epsom and Ascot every year—I shouldn’t wonder if she had bought the freehold of them—and always takes a brace of pretty girls with

her. If you would only let her drive you down to the Derby now, to-morrow week, I'll be responsible for your having a delightful day; and I'll be in attendance to show you everything and everybody worth seeing.'

'Thanks. I don't think my aunt cares for Mrs. Cinqmars.'

'Your aunt is about a century behind the times; but perhaps Flora—Mrs. C.—hasn't been civil enough to her. Let me drive you and Mrs. Chevenix down to Fulham this afternoon. Tuesday's her day for receiving, and you'll see no end of nice people there. I'll send my groom for the drag, and take you through the Park in good style.'

A four-in-hand seemed to Elizabeth the glory and triumph of the age; and there was nothing particular in the Eaton-place programme for this afternoon.

'I should like it very well,' she said, brightening, 'if auntie would consent.'

'O, I'll soon settle that,' replied Lord Pauly, rising from his *pouff*, and going into the next room.

Mrs. Chevenix, after a little diplomatic hesitation consented to everything except the drag.

'No young lady, with a proper regard for her reputation, can ride on the box-seat of a four-in-

hand, unless the coachman is her brother or her husband.'

'I'm very glad I'm not the first, in this case,' said Lord Paulyn; 'and I certainly mean to be the second, if I can.'

These were the plainest words the Viscount had yet spoken, and they moved the spirit of aunt Chevenix with exceeding joy, albeit she knew that her niece was engaged to Mr. Forde.

'If you really wish us to visit Mrs. Cinqmars—and you know, dear Lord Paulyn, there is very little I would not do to oblige you,' she said, with a maternal air—'I'll take Lizzie down to the Rancho in the brougham, and you can join us there if you like. Mrs. Cinqmars has called upon me several times, and I have not returned her visits. She seems a very good-natured little person; but, you see, I am getting an old woman, and don't care much about cultivating new acquaintance.'

Thus Mrs. Chevenix, who would have run herself into a fever in the pursuit of an unknown countess.

Lord Paulyn waived the question of the drag regretfully.

'My horses haven't been as fit as they are to-day since they came from grass,' he said, 'but I'll drive down alone. What time will you start? It's just

four ; Mrs. Cinqmars is always in full force from five to six.'

'If you'll be kind enough to ring the bell, I'll order the carriage for a quarter to five. I shall have time to dress after I've finished my letters for the general post.'

'Can't think how any one can write letters, now we've got the telegraph,' said Lord Pauly, staring in amazement at aunt Chevenix's bulky despatches ; 'I always wire.'

'But if you were in love, and separated from the object of your affection ?' suggested Mrs. Chevenix, smiling.

'I should wire ; or if I had something uncommonly spooney to say, I might spell it backwards in the second column of the *Times*. I don't know how to write a letter ; indeed, I'm not at all clear that I haven't forgotten how to write long-hand altogether. I keep my betting-book in cipher ; and when I send a telegram, I always dictate the message to the post-office clerk.'

'But I should have thought now, with respect to your racehorses, the telegraph system might be dangerous. There are things you want to keep dark, as you call it, are there not ?'

'Of course there are. But we've got our code,

my trainer and I, and our own private names for every brute in my stable. Got a message this morning: "Bryant and May taken to the bassoon." By which I know that Vesuvian, a two-year-old I was backing for next year, has been run out of her wind in some confounded trial, and is musical.'

'Musical!'

'Yes, ma'am; a roarer, if you want it in plain English.'

'Dear me, how provoking!' said Mrs. Chevenix, with a sympathetic countenance, but with not the faintest idea what the Viscount meant.

Elizabeth consented to the Rancho business languidly.

'I'd rather stay at home and finish my novel,' she said, looking at an open novel lying on one of the *pouffs*. 'You can't imagine what an exciting chapter you interrupted, Lord Paulyn; but of course I shall go if auntie likes. Auntie has such an insatiable appetite for society.'

Mrs. Chevenix raised her eyebrows, and regarded her niece with admiring wonder. 'Who would ever imagine the child had been reared in a Devonshire vicarage!' she exclaimed, as Elizabeth sat fanning herself, an image of listless grace.

'Who would have supposed Venus came out of

the sea!' replied the Viscount. 'She didn't look weedy, or sandy, or shell-fishy, that ever I heard of; but came up smiling, with her hair combed out as neatly as the tails and manes of my fillies. And as to rustic bringing-up, there was that young woman in the play—Lady Teazle, you know. See how she carried on.'

The Viscount departed after this, happy in the prospect of meeting Elizabeth an hour later in the happy hunting-grounds of the Rancho, perhaps the best field for flirtation within three miles of Hyde-park-corner.

'Elizabeth,' exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix, when they were alone, with an air of almost awful solemnity, 'there is a coronet lying at your feet, if you have only the wisdom to pick it up. I am not going to make any complaint, or to express my opinions, or to say anything in disparagement of *that person*. I have kept my feelings upon *that* subject locked within my breast, at any cost of pain to myself. But if, when you have looked around you, and seen what the world is made of, you can be so infatuated as to persist in your mad course, I can only pity you.'

'Don't take the trouble to do that, auntie. I can imagine no higher happiness than that which I have chosen. A coronet is a grand thing, of course, with

all the other things that go along with it. I am not going to pretend that I don't care for the world and its pleasures. I do care for them. I have enjoyed my life in the last three weeks more than I thought it possible that life could be enjoyed. I fear that I have an infinite capacity for frivolity. And yet I shall be proud to surrender all these things for the love of the man I have chosen.'

'The man you have chosen!' repeated Mrs. Chevenix, with a shiver. 'My dearest Lizzie, is there not a shade of indelicacy in the very phrase?'

'I can't help that,' answered Elizabeth coolly; 'I know that I did choose him. I chose him out from all creation for the lord of my life, worshipped him in secret when I thought he was indifferent to me; should have died of a broken heart, I believe, or at any rate of mortification and disappointment, if he had never returned my love.'

This was a bold declaration intended to extinguish aunt Chevenix at once and for ever.

'My poor child,' said the matron, shaking her head with a deplored air, 'I am inexpressibly grieved to hear you speak in that wild manner of such a person as your father's curate. A man in that position cannot afford to be loved in that exaggerated way. A *grande passion* is out of keeping among people

with limited incomes and their career to make in the world. With people of established position it is different, of course ; and though I might smile at such an infatuation, were you to entertain it for Lord Pauly, I could hardly disapprove. You and he would be as far removed from the vulgar herd of engaged persons as a prince and princess in a fairy tale, and might safely indulge in some little extravagance.'

' You need fear very little extravagance on my part if Lord Pauly were my accepted lover,' answered Elizabeth, with a cynical laugh. ' Imagine any one mated to that prosaic being, with his slang and his stable talk !'

' In spite of those small drawbacks—which, after all, are natural to his youth and open-hearted disposition—I believe him to be capable of a most devoted attachment. I have seen him gaze at you, Elizabeth, in a way that made my blood run cold when I considered that you were capable of trampling upon such a heart for the sake of a Scotch curate. However, I will say nothing,' concluded Mrs. Chevenix with heroism, after having said all she wanted to say.

In half-an-hour the two ladies were dressed, and on their way to Fulham ; Elizabeth enveloped in a

fleecy cloud of whiteness, with gleams of lustrous mauve here and there among her drapery, and a mauve feather in her white-chip hat, gloves faultless, parasol a gem: a toilet whose finishing touches had been furnished by the well-filled purse of Mrs. Chevenix. The matron herself was resplendent in bronze silk, and an imposing blue bonnet. They had put on their richest armour for the encounter with Mrs. Cinqmars, a lady who spent her life in trying to dress-down her acquaintance.

CHAPTER II.

‘Applause

Waits on success ; the fickle multitude,
Like the light straw that floats along the stream,
Glide with the current still, and follow fortune.’

FULHAM is a neighbourhood of infinite capabilities. It is almost impossible to know the ultimate boundaries of a region to which nature seems to have hardly yet assigned any limit ; from squalid streets of six-roomed houses, to splendid places surrounded by park-like grounds ; from cemeteries and market-gardens—bare expanses of asparagus or turnips, where the atmosphere is rank with decaying garden stuffs—to arenas reserved for the competition of the fleet-footed and strong-armed of our modern youth, and to shady groves dedicated to the slaughter of the harmless pigeon ; from newly-built red-brick mansions hiding themselves coyly within high walls, and darkened by the shade of immemorial cedars. Fulham has stomach for them all. Queer little lanes still lead the explorer to unknown (or at least to him

unknown) tracts of inland country; and on that wild shore between the bridges of Putney and Hammersmith there are far-spreading gardens and green lawns which a worldly-minded person might long for as the paradise of his departed soul.

The Rancho was one of these places by the river; a house and grounds which, after belonging to a titled owner, had sunk to gradual decay under undistinguished and incapable tenants; and, at last, coming into the market for a larger price than speculators were inclined to give, had, after hanging on hand for a long time, been finally bought a dead bargain by Mr. Cinqmars.

This gentleman, being amply provided with funds —whether his own or other people's was, of course, a minor question—and being, moreover, blest with a wife who had a taste, set to work to remodel the house, which was old and not capacious, and altogether in that condition in which it is cheaper to pull down than to rebuild. Mr. Cinqmars, however, left the lower reception rooms, which were fine, almost untouched, only widening the windows in the drawing-room to the whole width of the room, and putting a glass roof to the billiard-room, which could be replaced by an awning in warm weather, or thrown open to the sky on starlit summer nights. On each

side of these central rooms he built a commodious wing, in rustic wood-work, after the model of a Mexican farmhouse in which he had once spent a week during his travels. All round the house he put a wooden verandah, ten feet wide, and paved with cool blue and cream-coloured tiles; and having done this he furnished all the rooms in the purest rustic fashion—with light woods; pastoral chintzes scattered with violets and primroses; no draperies to the windows, which were amply shaded by Venetian blinds within and Spanish hoods without; very few carpets, but oak floors polished to distraction, and Indian matting in the passages. It was a house that was built apparently for eternal summer, but was yet so contrived as to be extremely comfortable when March winds were howling round the verandah, or an April snowstorm drifting against the glass roof of the billiard-room. On a real summer's day it was distractingly delightful; and to return from its light and airy chambers to the dingy square rooms of a London house—a mere packing-case set upon end in a row of other packing-cases—was not conducive to the preservation of a contented mind.

But Mr. and Mrs. Cinqmars were people who could not have lived in a house that was not better than everybody else's house. They were people who

lived upon their surroundings; their surroundings were themselves, as it were. If anybody asked who Mr. Cinqmars was, his friends and admirers plunged at once into a glowing description of the Rancho, or demanded with an air of amazement how it came to pass you had not seen his horses in the park—high-stepping bays, with brass-mounted harness. There was a place in Scotland too, which Mr. Cinqmars spoke of somewhat vaguely, and which might be anything, from half a county down to half-a-dozen acres. He was in the habit of promising his acquaintance good shooting on that domain; but in the hurry and pressure of modern life these promises are rarely fulfilled. Every man's autumn is mortgaged before the spring is over; there is nothing safer than a liberal dealing out of general invitations in June or July.

Mrs. Cinqmars was at home every Tuesday throughout the London season, and to be at home with Mrs. Cinqmars meant a great deal. The grounds of the Rancho were simply perfect—ancient gardens, with broad lawns gently sloping to the water; lawns whose deep and tender herbage had been cultivated for ages; forest trees which shut out the world on every side except that noble curve of the river which made a shallow bay before the windows of the Rancho; cedars of Lebanon spreading their dusky branches

wide above the shadowy sward. Mrs. Cinqmars did not to any great extent affect gaudy flower-beds—parallelograms of scarlet geranium and calceolaria, silver-gray leafage, and potting-out plants of the pickling-cabbage order—or ribbon bordering. Are not these things common to all the world? Instead of these, she had masses of rough stonework and young forests of fern in the shady corners of her grounds, and a regiment of century-old orange-trees in great green tubs, ranged along a broad walk leading down to the river. Her grounds were shady realms of greenery, rather than showy parterres. She had her hot-houses and forcing-pits somewhere in the background, and all her rooms were adorned to profusion with the choicest flowers; but only in the rose season was there much display of colour in the gardens of the Rancho. Then, indeed, Mrs. Cinqmars' lawn was as some fertile valley in Cashmere, and the very atmosphere which Mrs. Cinqmars inhaled was heavy with the odours of all the noblest and choicest families among the rose tribe—arcades of roses, roses climbing skyward upon iron rods, temples that looked like gigantic birdcages overrun with roses, roses everywhere—for a brief season of glory and delight, the season of fresh strawberry ices, and mature but not overgrown whitebait.

On these her days, Mrs. Cinqmars kept open-house from five o'clock upwards. There was a great dinner later in the evening, but by no means a formal banquet, for the men who came in morning-dress to lounge remained to dine; mature matrons, whose bonnets were as things immovable, were permitted to dine in that kind of headgear; there was a general air of Bohemianism about the Rancho; billiards were played till the summer daylight; the sound of cabs and phaetons, dog-carts and single broughams, startled the slumbering echoes in the Fulham lanes between midnight and sunrise; the goddess of pleasure was worshipped in a thorough-going unqualified manner, as intense as the devotion which inspired human sacrifices on the shrine of moonéd Ashtaroth.

In fine weather, when the sun was bright and the air balmy, and only occasional shivers reminded happy idlers that an English climate is treacherous, Mrs. Cinqmars delighted to receive her friends in the garden. Innumerable arm-chairs of foreign basket-work were to be found in snug little corners of the grounds; tiny tables were ready for the accommodation of teacups or ice-plates. Champagne and claret-cup were as bounteously provided as if those beverages had been running streams, watering the velvet lawns and meandering through the groves of the Rancho.

Wenham's clear ice was as plentiful as if the Thames had been one solid block from Thame to Nore. There was no croquet. In this, as in the flower-beds, Mrs. Cinqmars had been forestalled by all the world. But as a substitute for this universal recreation, Mrs. Cinqmars had imported all manner of curious games upon queer little tables with wiry mazes, and bells and balls, at which a good deal of money and a still larger amount of the manufacture of Piver or Jouvin were lost and won on that lady's Tuesdays. The châtelaine herself even was not insensible to the offerings of gloves; she had indeed an insatiable appetite for that commodity, and absorbed so many packets of apricot and lavender treble buttons from her numerous admirers, that it might be supposed that her husband, while lavishing upon her every other luxury, altogether denied her these emblems of civilisation. But as Mrs. Cinqmars was never seen in a glove which appeared to have been worn more than half-an-hour, it may be fairly imagined that her consumption of the article was large. Taking a moderate view of the case, and supposing that she wore only three pairs per diem, she would require more than a thousand pairs per annum, and this last straw in the expenses of her sumptuous toilet may have broken Mr. Cinqmars' back. However this

might be, Mrs. Cinqmars was singularly successful in all these small games of chance, tempered by skill, and did a good deal of ladylike speculation upon various races into the bargain, whereby the glove-boxes, not paltry toys made to hold half-a-dozen or so, but huge caskets of carved sandal wood, with partitions for the divers colours, were never empty. Young men were seen approaching her through the groves of the Rancho armed with dainty oblong packages, their humble tribute to the goddess of the grove, tribute which she received with a business-like coolness, as her due. There were malicious people who hinted that Mrs. Cinqmars was not inaccessible to larger offerings ; that diamond bracelets, ruby crosses, emerald ear-rings, which were not the gifts of her husband, had found their way to her jewel-cases ; but as Mr. Cinqmars was exorbitantly rich, this was of course a fabrication. Only there is an order of goddesses somewhat insatiable in the matter of tribute ; goddesses who, on being suddenly possessed of the Koh-i-noor, would that instant languish for the Star of the South, as a pendant thereto.

Upon this particular afternoon in May the air was balmy, and the sun unseasonably warm, for it is only the fond believer in idyllic poets who expects genial weather in May ; and the grounds of the

Rancho were gay with visitors, brightly-costumed groups scattered here and there in the shade; a perpetual crowd hovering about the footsteps of Mrs. Cinqmars as she moved to and fro among her guests, so delighted to see every one; a cheerful chatter of many voices, and a musical jingle of tea-spoons mildly suggestive of refreshment.

Mrs. Cinqmars was a little woman, with intensely-black eyes and long black hair—hair which she wore down her back, after the fashion of a horse's tail, and which reached ever so far below her waist—hair which she delighted to tie with bright-coloured ribbons. She was a woman who affected brilliant colours, and as she flashed here and there amidst the greenery, had something the air of a gorgeous paraquito from some far southern isle.

Her hair and her eyes were her strong points, and to come within the range of those tremendous orbs was like facing a battery of Lancastrians. They dealt ruin across the open country, bringing down their quarry at a terrific distance. To be able to stand the blaze of Mrs. Cinqmars' eyes, was to be case-hardened, tried in the fire of half-a-dozen London seasons. For the rest, she was hardly to be called a pretty woman. Her complexion was sallow; and as she wished to have the freehold and not a

short lease of whatever beauty she possessed, she was wise enough to refrain from the famous arts of our modern Medea, Madame Rachel Levison. Her small hands and feet, coquettish costumes, brilliant eyes, and luxuriant hair, she considered all-sufficient for the subjugation of mankind.

She received Mrs. Chevenix and her niece with effusion: so kind of them to come, and so on. And she really was glad to see them. They belonged to a class which she was peculiarly desirous to cultivate, the eminently respectable—not that she for her own part liked this order of beings, or would for worlds have had her parties composed of such alone; but a little leaven might leaven the whole lump, and Mrs. Cinqmars was quite aware that the mass of her society did require such leavening. Not that Mrs. Cinqmars was herself in any manner disreputable. She had never been accused of carrying a flirtation beyond the limits which society has prescribed for a young matron; she was known to be devoted to her husband and her husband's interests; and yet the friends and flatterers she gathered around her were not the choicest fruit in the basket; they were rather those ever-so-slightly-speckled peaches which only fetch a secondary price in the market. The class with which Mr. Cinqmars shared the glories of his wealth

and state was that class which seems by some natural affinity to ally itself with the wealthy parvenu—second-rate authors, newspaper men, and painters, fastish noblemen, military men with a passion for amateur theatricals, and so on ; *toute la boutique*, as Mrs. Cinqmars observed.

Mr. Cinqmars had a two-hundred-ton yacht of notorious speed and sailing capacity, which assisted him in the cultivation of youthful scions of the aristocracy, whose presence imparted a grace to the dinner-parties and kettledrums at the Rancho ; but it happened, unfortunately, that the youthful scions were for the most part impecunious, and did not materially advance Du Châtelet's interests. It was not often that Mr. and Mrs. Cinqmars were so fortunate as to cultivate such an acquaintance as Lord Paulyn, and the friendship of that wealthy nobleman had been a source of much gratification to both husband and wife. Reginald Paulyn liked the easy-going style of the Rancho ; liked to feel himself a god in that peculiar circle ; liked to be able to flirt with agreeable young women who were not perpetually beneath the piercing eye of a calculating parent or guardian, to flirt a little even, in a strictly honourable manner, with Mrs. Cinqmars herself ; to play billiards till the summer stars grew pale, or to gam-

ble in moonlit groves where the little bells on the be-wired and be-numbered boards tinkled merrily under the silent night. Lord Paulyn liked to enjoy himself without paying any tax in the shape of ceremony, and the Rancho offered him just this kind of enjoyment. He, too, had his yacht, the Pixy; so there was sympathy between him and the adventurous Du Châtelet, who had crossed the Atlantic in a half-decked pinnace of thirty tons, and discovered the source of the Nile for his own amusement, before any of the more distinguished explorers who have made themselves known to fame, according to his own account of his various and interesting career.

‘I like the Rancho, you know,’ the Viscount would remark to his friends, with a condescending air; ‘it’s like a little bit of Hombourg on the banks of the Thames; and Cinqmars isn’t half a bad fellow —a little loud of course, you know; and so is Mrs. C.; and one needn’t believe a large percentage of what either of ‘em says. But I rather like that kind of thing; one gets surfeited with good manners in the season.’

To these happy hunting-grounds, the Viscount was peculiarly desirous to introduce Elizabeth. It was all very well calling three or four times a week

in Eaton-place, and whiling away a couple of hours under the eye, or within reach of the ear, of Mrs. Chevenix; but the lover's soul languished for a closer communion than this, for *tête-à-tête* rambles under the forest-trees at Fulham; for a snug little corner on board Mrs. Cinqmars' barge, when she gave her great water-parties up the river, between Hampton lock and Henley; for waltzes in the rustic drawing-room, where half-a-dozen couples were wont to have the floor to themselves late in the night after the Cinqmars' dinners. The Viscount's chances of meeting his beloved in society were not numerous. His circle was not Mrs. Chevenix's circle, and it annoyed him to hear of dinners and balls to which Elizabeth was going, the dinners of wealthy professional men or commercial magnates, just outside the boundary of his patrician world. The Rancho offered an open field for their frequent meeting, and it was for this reason that the Viscount desired to bring about an alliance between Elizabeth and Mrs. Cinqmars.

Miss Luttrell accepted that lady's enthusiastic welcome with her usual coolness, and allowed her aunt to descant alone upon the charms of the Rancho grounds, and her astonishment at finding so large a domain on the very edge of London. Lord Paulyn

had arrived before them, and was ready to carry off Elizabeth at once to explore the beauties of the place.

‘I know you’re fond of old trees,’ he said, ‘and you must see Mrs. Cinqmars’ cedars.’

Flora Cinqmars looked after the two with an air of enlightenment. So Lord Paulyn was sweet upon that handsome Devonshire girl people talked so much about. The discovery was not an agreeable one. Mrs. Cinqmars liked her friends best while their affections were disengaged; and no doubt, if Lord Paulyn married, there would be an end of an acquaintance which had been very useful to her. She was not, however, an ill-natured person, so she gave her graceful shoulders a careless little shrug, and resigned herself to the inevitable.

‘I suppose I had better be civil to the girl,’ she thought; ‘and if he cuts us after he is married, I can’t help it. But perhaps he’ll hardly do that if he marries a parson’s daughter, though he might if he took up with some heavy swell, who’d run her pen through the list of his bachelor acquaintances, and put her veto on all the nicest people.’

Elizabeth found Mrs. Cinqmars’ afternoon by no means disagreeable. There were plenty of pleasant people and well-dressed people, a few eccentric toilets,

pour se divertir, a good many people with a certain kind of literary or artistic distinction, a mere effervescence of the hour, perhaps,—a temporary sparkle, which would leave them as flat as yesterday's unfinished bottles of champagne by next season, but which for the moment made them worth seeing. Then there were the grounds, pink and white horse-chestnuts in their Whitsuntide glory, and the river running swiftly downward under the westering sun.

Lord Paulyn tried his uttermost to keep Elizabeth to himself; to beguile her into lonely walks where he could pour forth the emotions of his soul, which did not express themselves in a particularly poetical manner at the best of times; but Elizabeth was anxious to see the celebrities, and a good many people were anxious to see her, as a celebrity in her own peculiar line, by reason of her beauty; so Lord Paulyn was thwarted in this desire, and was fain to be content with keeping his place at her side, whether she sat or walked, against all comers.

‘I never do seem able to get five minutes’ quiet talk with you,’ he said at last, almost savagely, when Mrs. Chevenix had joined them, and was talking of going back to town.

‘I really cannot imagine what you can have to

say that can't quite as well be said in a crowd as in solitude,' answered Elizabeth coldly.

She gave him these little checks occasionally, not quite forgetting that she was the plighted wife of another man—a fact which she had begged her aunt to tell Lord Pauly, and which she fondly supposed had been imparted to him. Secure in the idea that the Viscount had been made acquainted with her position, or at any rate serenely indifferent to that gentleman's feelings, she enjoyed her new life, and permitted his attentions with a charming carelessness, as if he had been of little more account than an affectionate Skye terrier. It was one of the prerogatives of her beauty to be admired, and she was worldly-wise enough to know that her position in her aunt's circle was wondrously enhanced by Lord Pauly's very evident subjugation. He had as yet neither committed himself, nor alarmed her, by any direct avowal; she had taken care to keep him so completely at bay as to prevent such a crisis.

And even in the midst of all these pleasures and excitements, in this atmosphere of adulation, her heart did yearn for the lover from whom she was parted; for the light of those dark steadfast eyes; the grasp of that strong hand, whose touch thrilled her soul; for the sound of that earnest voice, whose

commonest word was sweeter than all other utterances upon this earth. She did think of him ; yes, in the very press and hurry of her new life, and still more deeply in every chance moment of repose —even to-day under those wide-spreading chestnuts, beside that sunlit river. How doubly, trebly, unutterably sweet this life would have been could she but have shared it with him !

‘If some good fairy would change the positions of the two men,’ she thought childishly, ‘and make Malcolm Lord Paulyn, what a happy creature I should be !’

And then she was angry with herself for thinking so base a thought. Had she not won much more than the world in winning him ?

‘He knows that I am not good, that I am just the very last of women he ought to have chosen, and yet he loves me. I am proud to think of that. I should have hardly valued his love if he had only chosen me because I was good and proper, and a suitable person for his wife,’ she argued with herself.

Mrs. Cinqmars entreated her new friends to stay to dinner. There were a great many people going to stay, really pleasant people. Mr. Burjoyce the fashionable novelist, and Mr. Macduff the Scotch

landscape painter, whose Ben Lomond was one of the pictures of the year; and Lord Paulyn had promised to stay if Mrs. Chevenix and Miss Luttrell would stay, whereby it would be peculiarly cruel of them to depart. But Mrs. Chevenix was inflexible; she was not going to make herself cheap in society which she felt to be second-rate, however cool the champagne cup, however soft the sward on which she trod.

‘You are very good,’ she said; ‘but it is quite impossible. We have engagements for this evening.’

Lord Paulyn hereupon began to talk of the Derby.

‘I want to get up a party, Mrs. Cinqmars,’ he said, ‘or you shall get it up if you like, as you’re a top-sawyer at that kind of thing. Suppose I lend you my drag, and you can ask Mrs. Chevenix, and Miss Luttrell, and myself, and a few other nice people; and Cinqmars and I will tool the team, eh? wouldn’t that be rather jolly?’

Mrs. Cinqmars opined that it would be charming—if dear Mrs. Chevenix would go.

Dear Mrs. Chevenix beheld a prospect of being choked with dust, and blinded by a blazing sun, or chilled to the marrow by an east wind, and was not elated. And after all it might be almost wiser

to let Elizabeth go to the races with this rather fast Mrs. Cinqmars, without the restraint of any sterner chaperon. It might bring matters to a crisis.

‘He can’t propose to her if I’m always at her elbow,’ thought the sagacious matron. ‘I am hardly equal to the fatigue of a Derby day,’ she said; ‘but if Mrs. Cinqmars would not think it too much trouble to take care of Elizabeth—’

Mrs. Cinqmars protested that she would be charmed with such a charge. Elizabeth’s eyes sparkled: a race-course was still an unknown pleasure, one of the many mysteries of that brilliant world which she desired to know by heart before she bade her long good-bye to it.

So, after a little discussion, it was settled that Miss Luttrell was to go to Epsom in the drag with Mrs. Cinqmars.

‘But I must see you between this and to-morrow week,’ exclaimed that lady, who, perceiving in which quarter the wind lay, was resolved to make the best of the situation, and establish herself in the good graces of the future Viscountess. ‘I have a carpet-dance on Friday evening; you really must come to me, Mrs. Chevenix. Now pray don’t say you are full of engagements for Friday night.’

‘We are to dine in the Boltons,’ hesitated Mrs. Chevenix; ‘we might possibly—’

‘Drive on here afterwards,’ cried Mrs. Cinqmars; ‘of course you could. Remember you are to be with me on Friday, Lord Pauly.’

‘I shall certainly come, if—’

‘If Miss Luttrell comes. It’s really too bad of you to make me feel how little weight *my* influence has. Good-bye, if you positively won’t stay to dinner. I must go and say good-bye to those blue-and-white young ladies yonder.’

And with a sweeping continental curtsey, Mrs. Cinqmars flitted away in her befrilled-muslin draperies, and wonderful cherry-coloured satin petticoat with its organ-pipe flutings, and flying ebon tresses—a figure out of a fashion plate.

‘I’ve told Captain Callender to drive the drag home,’ said the Viscount; ‘I thought perhaps you’d be charitable enough to give me a seat in your brougham, Mrs. Chevenix.’

The third seat in Mrs. Chevenix’s brougham was entirely at his disposal, not a very roomy seat; he was carried back to town half smothered in silk and muslin, but very well contented with his position nevertheless.

‘Are you going to some very tremendous set-out

this evening?' asked Lord Paulyn as they drove home-wards.

'We are not going out at all, only I didn't feel inclined to accept Mrs. Cinqmars' invitation, so I had recourse to a polite fiction,' answered Mrs. Chevenix.

'And I am particularly engaged to finish that novel in which you interrupted me so ruthlessly this morning,' said Elizabeth.

'But the novel need not prevent your dining with us this evening, if you have no better engagement,' rejoined Mrs. Chevenix.

'If I have no better engagement! As if I could have a better engagement.'

'You might have a better dinner, at any rate. I can only promise you our everyday fare,' answered the matron, secure in the possession of a good cook.

She had made a mental review of her dinner before hazarding the invitation: spring soup, a salmon trout, an infantine shoulder of lamb, a sweetbread, a gooseberry tart, and a parmesan omelette. He would hardly get a better dinner at his club; and had doubtless seen many a worse at Ashcombe.

'I should like to come of all things,' said the

Viscount. 'And if you'd like to hear Patti this evening, I'll send my man to Mitchell's for a box while we dine,' he added to Elizabeth.

To that young lady the Italian Opera-house was still a scene of enchantment.

'I cannot hear Patti too often,' she said; 'I should like to carry away the memory of her voice when I turn my back upon the world.'

'Turn your back upon the world!' echoed Lord Pauly. 'What do you mean by that? You're not thinking of going into a convent, are you?'

'She is thinking of nothing so foolish,' said Mrs. Chevenix hastily.

'No; but the world and I will part company when I go back to Devonshire.'

'O, but you're not going back in a hurry. You must stop for Goodwood, you know. She must stop for Goodwood, mustn't she, Mrs. Chevenix?'

'I should certainly like to take her down to Brighton for the Goodwood week.'

'Yes, and I would have the drag down, and drive you backwards and forwards.'

'My holiday must come to an end before July,' said Elizabeth; and then turning to her aunt, she said almost sternly, 'You know, aunt, there is a reason for my going back soon.'

‘I know of no reason, but your own whims and follies,’ exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix impatiently; ‘and I know that I made all my arrangements for taking you back to Devonshire early in the autumn, and not before that time.’

Elizabeth’s smooth young brow darkened a little, and she was silent for the rest of the drive; but this was not the first indication of a temper of her own with which the damsel had favoured Lord Pauly, and it by no means disenchanted him. Indeed, by a strange perversity, he liked her all the better for such evidences of high spirit.

‘I shall find out the way to break her in when once she belongs to me,’ he thought coolly.

The little dinner in Eaton-place-south went off very gaily. Elizabeth had recovered her serenity, and was elated by the idea of a night with Patti and Mozart. She went to the piano and sang some of the airs from *Don Giovanni* while they were waiting for dinner; her fresh young mezzo-soprano sounding rich and full as the voices of the thrushes and black-birds in the grounds of the Rancho. She was full of talk during dinner; criticised Mrs. Cinqmars and the Rancho with a little dash of cynicism; was eager for information upon the probabilities of the Derby, and ready to accept any bets which Lord Pauly proposed

to her; and she seemed to have forgotten the very existence of such a place as Hawleigh.

Yet after the opera that night there was a little recrimination between the aunt and niece; there had been no time for it before.

‘I hope you have enjoyed your day and evening, Lizzie,’ said Mrs. Chevenix as the girl flung off her cloak, and seated herself upon a sofa in her aunt’s dressing-room, with a weary air. ‘I’m sure you have had attention and adulation enough this day to satisfy the most exacting young woman.’

‘I hardly know what you understand by attention and adulation. If I have had anything of the kind, it has all been from one person. Lord Pauly has not allowed me to say half-a-dozen words to any one but himself; and as his ideas are rather limited, it has been extremely monotonous.’

‘I should have supposed Lord Pauly’s attentions would have been sufficient for any reasonable young woman.’

‘Perhaps. If she happened to be disengaged, and wished to secure him for her husband. Not otherwise. And that reminds me of something I wanted to say to you, auntie: you must remember my asking you to tell Lord Pauly of my engagement to Mr. Forde.’

‘Yes, I remember something of the kind.’

‘But you have not told him.’

‘No, Elizabeth, I have not,’ replied the matron, busy taking off the various bracelets in which she was wont to fetter herself as heavily as an apprehended housebreaker, and with her eyes bent upon her work. ‘There are limits even to my forbearance; and that I should introduce you to society, to *my* friends, with that wretched engagement stamped upon you—labelled, as it were, like one of the pictures in the Academy—is something more than I could brook. I have not told Lord Paulyne, and I tell you frankly that I shall not waste my breath in announcing to any one an engagement which I do not believe will ever be fulfilled.’

‘What!’ cried Elizabeth, starting from her half-recumbent attitude, and standing tall and straight before the audacious speaker. ‘What! Do you think that I would jilt him, that after having pined and hungered for his love I would wantonly fling it away? Yes, I will speak the truth, however you may ridicule or despise me. I loved him with all my heart and soul for a year before he told me that my love was not all wasted anguish. I was breaking my heart when he came to my rescue, and translated me from the lowest depths of despondency to a heaven of de-

light. Do you think that after I have suffered so much for his sake I would trifle with the treasure I have won ?'

'Please don't stand looking at me like Miss Bateman in *Leah*,' said aunt Chevenix, with an ease of manner which was half-assumed. 'I think you are the most foolish girl it was ever my misfortune to be connected with, and I freely admit that it is hardly safe to speculate upon the conduct of such an irrational being. But I will nevertheless venture to prophecy that you will not marry your curate, and that you will marry some one a great deal better worth having.'

'I will never see Lord Paulyn again. I will go back to Hawleigh to-morrow,' said Elizabeth.

'Do just as you please,' replied Mrs. Chevenix coolly, knowing that opposition would only inflame the damsel's pride.

'Or, at any rate, I shall tell Lord Paulyn of my engagement.'

'Do, my dear. But as he has never spoken of his regard for you, the information may appear somewhat gratuitous.'

Elizabeth stood before her silent, lost in thought.

To turn and fly would be the wisest, safest course. She felt that her position was a false one ; dangerous

even, with some small danger ; that Lord Paulyn's attentions, commonplace as they might be, were attentions she, Malcolm's plighted wife, had no right to receive. She knew that all these garish pleasures and dissipations which occupied her mind from morning till night were out of harmony with the life she had chosen ; the fair calm future which she dreamed of sometimes, after falling asleep worn out by the day's frivolous labours. But to go back suddenly, after it had been arranged that she should remain with her aunt at least a month longer, was not easy. There would be such wonderment on the part of her sisters, so many questions to answer. Even Malcolm himself would be naturally surprised by her impetuosity, for in her very last letter she had carefully explained to him the necessity for her visit being extended until the second week in June.

No, it was not easy to return to the shelter of Hawleigh Vicarage ; and, on the other hand, there was her unsatisfied curiosity about the Derby, that one peculiar pleasure of a great race which had been described to her as beyond all other pleasures. Better to drain the cup to satiety, so that there might be no after longings. She would take care to give the Viscount no encouragement during the remainder of her brief career ; she would snub him ruthlessly,

even though he were a being somewhat difficult to snub. So she resolved to stay, and received her aunt's pacific advances graciously, and went to bed and dreamt of the *Commendatore*; and the statue that stalked in time to that awful music—music which is the very essence of all things spectral—bore the face of *Malcolm Forde*.

CHAPTER III.

‘Bianca’s heart was coldly frosted o’er
With snows unmelting—an eternal sheet;
But his was red within him, like the core
Of old Vesuvius, with perpetual heat;
And oft he long’d internally to pour
His flames and glowing lava at her feet;
But when his burnings he began to spout,
She stopp’d his mouth—and put the *crater* out.’

THE Derby-day was over; an exceptionally brilliant Derby, run under a summer-like sky; roads gloriously dusty; western breezes blowing; the favourite, a famous French horse, triumphant; everybody, except perhaps the book-men, and sundry other mistaken speculators, elated; Mrs. Cinqmars seeing her way to a twelvemonth’s supply of Piver and Jouvin; Elizabeth also a considerable winner of the same species of spoil.

The Viscount was not altogether delighted by the great event of the day. He had withdrawn his own entries two or three months ago, but had backed a

Yorkshire horse, from Whitehall, somewhat heavily, sceptical as to the merits of the Frenchman.

‘It’s all very well while he’s among French horses,’ he had said, ‘winning your Grand Prix, and that kind of thing ; but let him come over here and lick a field of genuine English blood and sinew, if he can.’

The Frenchman had accepted the challenge, and had left the pride and glory of many a British stable in the ruck behind his flying heels.

‘Couldn’t have done it if there wasn’t English blood in him,’ said the Viscount grimly, as he pushed his way within the sacred precincts to see the jockey weighed. ‘I wish I’d had some money on him.’

Instead of the pleasing idea of that potful of money which he might have secured by backing the Frenchman, Lord Pauly had a cargo of gloves to provide for the fair speculators—whose eager championship of the stranger he had smiled at somewhat scornfully half-an-hour ago—to say nothing of far heavier losses which only such estates as the Pauly domains could bear easily.

‘I shall pull up on Ascot,’ he thought, and was not sorry to resign the reins to Mr. Cinqmars during the homeward journey, while he abandoned his powerful mind to a close calculation of his chances for the great meeting. He was a man with whom the

turf was a serious business ; a man who went as carefully into all the ins and outs of horse-racing, as a great financier into the science of the stock-exchange ; and he had hitherto contrived to make his winnings cover all his stable expenses, and even at times leave a handsome margin beyond them. Above all things he hated losing, and his meditative brow, as he sat beside Mr. Cinqmars, bore a family resemblance to the countenance of the astute dowager when she gave herself up to the study of her private ledger.

Even Elizabeth's fresh young voice running gaily on just behind him did not arouse him from his moody abstraction. He had been all devotion during the drive to Epsom, and Miss Luttrell's coldness and incivility, which of late had been marked, had not been sufficient to repel or discourage him. What did he care whether she were civil or uncivil ? He rather liked those chilling airs, and angry flashes from brilliant eyes. They gave a charm and piquancy to her society which he had never found in the insipid amiability of other women. What did it matter how she flouted him ? He meant to marry her, and she of course meant to marry him. It was not to be supposed that any woman in her right mind would refuse such an offer. And in the mean while these coldnesses, and little bitter speeches, and disdainful looks

were the merest coquettices—a Benedick-and-Beatrice or Katherine-and-Petruchio kind of business. See how uncivil that fair shrew was at the outset, and how much she bore from her newly-wedded master afterwards. Lord Paulyn smiled to himself as he thought of Petruchio. ‘I’ve got a trifle of that sort of stuff in me,’ he said to himself complacently.

‘What is the matter with Lord Paulyn?’ asked Elizabeth of Mrs. Cinqmars, when they were changing horses at Mitcham, and the Viscount’s gloom became, for the first time, obvious to her. She had been too busy to notice him until that moment, agreeably employed in discussing the day’s racing with a couple of cavalry officers, particular friends of Mr. Cinqmars, who were delighted with the privilege of instructing her in the mysteries of the turf. She had a way of being intensely interested in whatever engaged her attention for the moment, and was as eager to hear about favourites and jockeys as if she had been the daughter of some Yorkshire squire, almost cradled in a racing stable, and swaddled in a horse-cloth.

‘I’m afraid he has been losing money,’ said Mrs. Cinqmars, as the Viscount descended to inspect his horses and refresh himself with brandy-and-soda. ‘He ought to have backed the foreigner. He does look rather glum, doesn’t he?’

‘Does he mind losing a little money?’ exclaimed Elizabeth incredulously.

‘I don’t think there are many people who like it,’ answered Mrs. Cinqmars, laughing.

‘But he is so enormously rich, I should have thought he could hardly care about it. I know that Lady Pauly, his mother, is very fond of money; but for a young man to care—I should have thought it impossible.’

‘Very low, isn’t it?’ said Major Bolding, one of her instructors in the science of racing; ‘but rather a common weakness. So very human. Only it’s bad form to show it, as Pauly does.’

‘It’s only rich people who have a genuine affection for money,’ remarked Mrs. Cinqmars; ‘a poor man never keeps a sovereign long enough to become attached to it.’

The examination of his team did not tend to improve the Viscount’s temper. They had sustained various infinitesimal injuries in the journey to and from the course, so he refreshed himself by swearing a little in a subdued manner at his grooms, who had nothing to do with these damages, and then consumed his brandy-and-soda in a sullen silence, only replying to Mr. Cinqmars’ lively remarks by reluctant monosyllables.

‘Can’t you let a fellow alone when you see he’s thinking?’ he exclaimed at last.

‘I wouldn’t think too much if I were you, Paulyn,’ said Mr. Cinqmars, in his genial, happy-go-lucky manner; ‘I don’t believe you’ve the kind of brain that can stand it. I’ve made a point of never thinking since I was five-and-twenty. I go up to the City and do my work in a couple of hours with pen, ink, and paper; all my figures before me in black-and-white, not dancing about my brain from morning till night, and from night till morning, as some men let them dance. When I’ve settled everything at my desk, I give my junior partner his orders. And before I’ve taken my hat off the peg to leave the office, I’ve emptied my brain of all business ideas and perplexities as clean as if I’d taken a broom and swept it.’

‘All very well while you’re making money,’ said the Viscount, ‘but you couldn’t do that if you were losing.’

‘Perhaps not. But there are men who can’t make money without wearing their brains out with perpetual mental arithmetic, men who carry the last two pages of their banking-book pasted upon the inside of their heads, and are always going over the figures. Those are the men who go off their nuts by

the time they're worth a million or so, and cut their throats for fear of dying in a workhouse. Come, I say, Paulyn, I know you're savage with yourself for not backing the foreigner, but you can put your money on him for the Leger, and come home that way.'

'Very likely, when there's five to four on him!' cried the Viscount contemptuously. Then brightening a little, he inquired what was to be the order of things that night at the Rancho.

'We've a lot of people coming to dinner at nine, or so, and I suppose my wife means a dance afterwards.'

'Like Cremorne,' said Lord Paulyn. 'Mind your wife makes Miss Luttrell stay.'

'O, of course; we couldn't afford to lose the star of the evening. A fine girl, isn't she?' added Mr. Cinqmars, glancing critically upwards at the figure in the front seat of the drag.

'A fine girl!' echoed the Viscount contemptuously; 'she's the handsomest woman I ever set eyes on, bar none.'

Lord Paulyn improved considerably after this, and when he went back to the box-seat took care that Major Bolding had no farther opportunity of demonstrating his familiarity with the *arcana* of the turf.

He engaged the whole of Elizabeth's attention, and was not to be rebuffed by her coldness, and took upon himself the manner of an acknowledged lover; a manner which was not a little embarrassing to the plighted wife of Malcolm Forde.

'I must make an end of it as soon as possible,' she thought. 'I don't know that to-day's amusement has been worth the penalty I have to pay for it.'

The drag was crossing Clapham-common, an admiring crowd gazing upward at the patrician vehicle as it towered above wagonettes, barouches, landaus, hansom, and costermongers' trucks, when Elizabeth gave a little start of surprise at recognising a face that belonged to Hawleigh. It was only the rubicund visage of a Hawleigh farmer, a man who had a family pew at St. Clement's, and who dutifully attended the two services every Sunday, with an apple-cheeked wife and a brood of children. He was one of a very hilarious party in a wagonette, a party of stout middle-aged persons of the publican order, who were smoking vehemently, and had wooden dolls stuck in their hatbands. She saw him look up and recognise her with ineffable surprise, and immediately communicate the fact of her presence to his companions, whereat there was a general upward gaze of admir-

ing eyes, more or less bedimmed by dubious chambagne.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked Lord Paulyn, perceiving that slight movement of surprise.

‘Nothing. I saw a person I know in a wagonette; only Mr. Treby, a farmer who goes to papa’s church; but I was surprised at seeing him here.’

‘Not very astonishing; the Derby is a grand festival for provincials; and we are such an unenlightened set in the West, we have no great races. For a Yorkshireman, now, there is nothing to see in the South. His own racecourses are as fine as anything we can show him here.’

Elizabeth was silent. She was thinking how Mr. Treby would go back and tell the little world of Hawleigh how he had seen her perched high up on a gaudy yellow-bodied coach, one of two women among a party of a dozen men, dominating that noisy dissipated-looking crowd, with a pink-lined parasol between her and the low sunlight; and she was thinking that the picture would hardly seem a pleasing vision to the eyes of Malcolm Forde. She had meant of course to tell him of her day at Epsom, but then the same things might seem very different described by herself and by Mr. Treby. She tried to take comfort from the thought that, after all, Mr. Treby might

say very little about the encounter, and that the little he did say might not happen to reach Malcolm's ears. Malcolm ! dear name ! Only to breathe it softly to herself was like the utterance of some soothing spell.

After that glimpse of Mr. Treby's rubicund visage in the wagonette her spirits flagged a little. She was glad when the drag crossed Putney-bridge. How brightly ran the river under the western sun ! How gay the steep old-fashioned street, with its flags and open windows and noisy taverns and lounging boating-men ! The scene had a garish tawdry look, somehow, and her head ached to desperation. She was very glad when they drove into the cool shades of the Rancho.

‘ O yes, thanks ; I’ve had a most delightful day,’ she said, in reply to Mrs. Cinqmars’ inquiry as to her enjoyment of the great festival ; ‘ but the noise and the sunshine have given me a headache, and I think, if you would let me go home at once, it would be best for me.’

‘ Go home ! nonsense, my dear ! Your aunt is to dine with us, and take you back after our little dance. It’s only half-past seven. You shall have a cup of green tea, and then lie down and rest for an hour, and you’ll be as fresh as a rose by nine o’clock.

Turner, take Miss Luttrell to the blue room, and make her comfortable.'

This order was given to a smartly-dressed maid, who had come to take the ladies' cloaks and parasols.

Elizabeth gave a little sigh of resignation. If it were possible to grow sick to death of this bright new world all in a moment, such a sickness seemed to have come upon her. But from the maelstrom of pleasure, be it only the feeblest provincial whirlpool, swift and sudden extrication is, for the most part, difficult.

'I will stop, if you wish,' she said; 'but my head is really very bad.'

In spite of her headache, however, Miss Luttrell appeared at the banquet—which was delayed by tardy arrivals till about a quarter to ten—brightest amongst the brilliant. Mrs. Chevenix was there in her glory, on the right hand of Mr. Cinqmars, and was fain to confess to herself that the society which these people contrived to get about them was by no means despicable—a little fast, undoubtedly, and with the masculine element predominating somewhat obviously; but it was pleasant, when venturing out of one's own strictly correct circle, to find oneself among so many people with handles to their names. Lord Paulyne had by this time entirely recovered his equanimity,

and had contrived to take Elizabeth in to dinner—a somewhat noisy feast, at which everybody talked of the event of the day, as if it were the beginning, middle, and end of the great scheme of creation. The wide windows were all open to the spring night; hanging moderator lamps shed their subdued light upon a vast oval table, which was like a dwarf forest of ferns, stephanotis, and scarlet geranium. It was quite as good as dining out-of-doors, without the inconveniences attendant upon the actual thing.

A little after eleven o'clock there came a crash of opening chords from a piano, cornet, and violin, artfully hidden in a small room off the drawing-room, and then the low entrancing melody of a waltz by Strauss. The ladies rose at the sound, and the greater number of the gentlemen left the dining-room with them.

‘We can leave those fellows drinking curaçoa and squabbling about the odds for the Oaks,’ said Major Bolding. ‘We don’t want them.’

This was an undeniable fact; for the danseuses were much in the minority. There were a sprinkling of wives of authors and actors; a few dearest friends of Mrs. Cinqmars, who seemed to stand more or less alone in the world, and to be free-lances in the way of flirtation; a young lady with long raven

ringlets and a sentimental air, who was said to be something very great in the musical line, but was rarely allowed to exhibit her talents ; a stout literary widow, who founded all her fashionable novels on the society at the Rancho ; and a popular actress, who could sometimes be persuaded to gratify her friends with the 'Charge of the Six Hundred,' or the famous scene between Mr. Pickwick and the Bath magistrate.

Elizabeth found herself assailed by a herd of eager supplicants, who entreated for round dances. No one ever suggested quadrilles at the Rancho, nor were these unceremonious assemblies fettered by the iron bondage of a programme.

'Remember,' said Lord Pauly, 'you've promised me three waltzes.'

'If I dance at all ; but I don't think I shall.'

'Neither shall I, then,' answered the Viscount coolly. '*A d'autres*, gentlemen, Miss Luttrell doesn't dance to-night.'

'I'd rather take a refusal from the lady's own lips, if it's all the same to you, Pauly,' said Major Bolding.

'The dust and heat have given me an excruciating headache, and I really do not feel equal to waltzing,' answered Elizabeth.

‘ Shall I get them to play a quadrille ?’

‘ No, thanks. I’m hardly equal to that, either ; and I know Mrs. Cinqmars hates square dances.’

‘ Never mind Mrs. Cinqmars. Half a loaf is better than no bread. If you’ll dance the first set, the Lancers—anything— Shall I tell the fellow to play the *Grande Duchesse* or *la Belle Hélène* ?’

‘ Please, don’t. But if you’ll take me for a turn by the river, I should be glad. Will you come, auntie ? I don’t suppose these rooms really are hot ; but in spite of all those open windows, I feel almost stifled.’

Lord Paulyn’s countenance was obscured by a scowl at this proposition, and Mrs. Chevenix was quick to perceive the cloud. What could Elizabeth mean by such incorrigible fatuity ? Was it not bad enough to have a country curate in the background, without introducing a new element of discord in the person of this dashing major ? There was no time for careful diplomacy ; the situation demanded an audacious master-stroke.

‘ Lord Paulyn can take care of you, Lizzie,’ said the matron, ‘ and I’ll ask Major Bolding to give me his arm ; for I want to talk to him about my dear friends the Clutterbucks. Relatives of yours, are they not, Major ?’

‘Yes ; Tom Clutterbuck’s something in the way of a cousin,’ growled the reluctant Major, rather sulkily. ‘But they’re in Rome, and I haven’t heard of them for an age.’

He offered his arm to the aunt instead of the niece, with a tolerably resigned air, however, perceiving that the position was more critical than he had supposed, and not wishing to mar Miss Luttrell’s chances. So Mrs. Chevenix sailed off through the open window to the lawn, a ponderous figure in purple satin and old point, and Elizabeth found herself constrained to accept the escort of the man she so ardently desired to keep at a convenient distance.

They walked slowly down to the river terrace, almost in silence. That scene of a moonlit garden by a moonlit river is one of those pictures whose beauty seems for ever fresh : from Putney to Reading, what a succession of river-side parades greets the envious eyes of the traveller ! And at sight of every new domain he cries, ‘O, this is lovelier than all the rest ! here would I end my days.’ And all mankind’s aspirations after a comfortable income and a peaceful existence include

‘A river at my garden’s end.’

But it was not the tranquil splendour of the moon-

light or the eternal beauty of the river that moved the soul of Reginald Paulyn, and held him in unaccustomed silence. He was angry. Some dull sparks of his vexation at having backed the wrong horse yet smouldered in his breast; but he was much more angry at the conduct of Elizabeth Luttrell. It was all very well to be snubbed, to be trifled with, to be played with as a fish that the angler means to land anon with tender care, but there had been something too much of this. The damsels had said one or two things at dinner that had been intended to enlighten him, and had in some measure removed the bandage from his eyes. He wanted to know the exact meaning of these speeches. He wanted to know, without an hour's delay, whether she, Elizabeth Luttrell, a country parson's penniless daughter, were capable of setting him at naught.

He hardly knew in what words to frame his desire; and perhaps at this moment, for the first time in his life, it dawned upon him that the chosen vocabulary of his own particular set was a somewhat restricted language for a man in his position.

Elizabeth made some remark about the beauty of the scene—so much better than any drawing-room—and he answered her mechanically, and that was all that was said by either until they came to the river

terrace, by which time Mrs. Chevenix and her companion, who had walked briskly, were at some distance from them.

‘Stop a bit, Miss Luttrell,’ said Lord Paulyn, coming to a sudden standstill by the stone balustrade that guarded a flight of steps leading down to the water. ‘Don’t be in such a hurry to overtake those two ; they’ll get on well enough without us. I want to talk to you—about—about something very particular.’

Elizabeth’s heart sank at this ominous prelude. She felt that it was coming, that crisis which of late she had done her uttermost to avert.

‘I can’t imagine what you can have to say to me,’ she said, with an airy little laugh and a very fair assumption of carelessness.

Lord Paulyn leant upon the balustrade, with his elbow planted on the stone, looking up at her with a resolute scrutiny.

‘Can’t you?’ he asked somewhat bitterly. ‘And yet I should think it was easy enough for you to guess what I’m going to say to you in plain words to-night. I’ve been saying it in a hundred ways for the last six weeks—saying it plain enough for any one to understand, I should have thought—any one in their senses, at least, and there doesn’t seem room

for much doubt about yours. I love you, Elizabeth—that's what I have to say—and I mean you to be my wife.'

'You *mean* me,' cried Elizabeth, with inexpressible scorn, and a laugh that stung her lover as sharply as a blow—'you *mean* me to be your wife! Upon my honour, Lord Paulyn, you have quite an oriental idea of a woman's position. You are to fling your handkerchief to your favourite slave, and she is to pick it up and bring it to you with a curtsey.'

'You never look so handsome as when you are angry,' said the Viscount undismayed, and smiling at her wrath. 'But don't be angry with me; I didn't intend to offend you. I should have said the same if you had been a princess of the blood royal. I only tell you what I swore to myself last November, the day I first saw your face in Hawleigh church: That's the woman I'll have for my wife. I never yet set my heart upon anything that I didn't win it. I know how cleverly you've played me for the last five weeks, keeping me on by keeping me off, eh? But we may as well drop all that sort of thing now, Elizabeth. You are the only woman in this world I'll ever make a viscountess of; and of course you've known that all along, or you wouldn't have given me the encouragement you have given me, in your offhand way. Don't

try to humbug me. I'm a man of the world, and I've known from the first that it was a settled thing between you and the old woman—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Chevenix.'

'Encouragement!' cried Elizabeth, aghast; 'I give you encouragement, Lord Paulyn! Why, I've done everything in the world to show you my indifference.'

'O, yes; I know all about that. You've been uncivil enough, I grant you, and many a man in my position would have been choked off; but I'm not that kind of fellow. You've given me as much of your society as circumstances allowed—that's the grand point—and you must have known that every day made me more desperately in love with you. You're not going to round upon me and pretend indifference after that. It would be rather too bad.'

Elizabeth was silent for a brief space, conscience-stricken. She had deemed this lordling of so shallow a nature that it could matter little how she trifled with him. He had his *grande passion*, no doubt, every season—hovered butterfly-like around some particular flower in the fashionable parterre, and flew off unscathed when London began to grow empty. That she could inflict any wrong upon him by suffering his attentions had never occurred to her. She had

thought at one time even that it would be rather nice to bring him to her feet, and astound him by a cool refusal. And even now, though she was not a little perplexed by a kind of rough earnestness and intensity in his speech and manner, she did feel a faint thrill of triumph in the idea of his subjugation. It would be something to tell Gertrude and Diana—those representatives of her little world, who had sneered at the humble end of all her grand ideas: there would be not a little satisfaction to her pride in being able to tell them that Lord Paulyn had actually proposed to her.

The coronet of the Paulyns, the airy round and top of sovereignty, floated before her vision for a moment, as she looked across the moonlit river, phantom-wise, like Macbeth's dagger. If she had not loved that other one above the sordid splendours of the world, what a brilliant fortune might have been hers! And Reginald was not positively obnoxious to her. He was good-looking, seemed good-natured, had been the veriest slave of her every whim, and she had grown accustomed to his society. She had so doubt that he would have made a very tolerable husband; and as the inexhaustible source of carriages, horses, opera-boxes, diamonds, yachts, and riverside villas, she must needs have regarded him

with a certain grateful fondness, had she been free to accept him. But she was bound to a man whom she loved to distraction, and not to be an empress would she have loosened that dear bondage.

‘It is all my aunt’s fault,’ she said, after that brief pause; ‘I begged her—she ought to have told you that I am engaged to be married.’

‘Engaged !’ cried the Viscount; ‘engaged ! Not since you’ve come to town ! Why I know almost every fellow that’s been hanging about you, and they’ve had precious little chance, unless it’s some one you’ve met at those confounded parties on the other side of Hyde-park.’

‘I was engaged before I came to London.’

‘What, to some fellow in Hawleigh ! And you let me dance attendance upon you, and spend three mornings a week in Eaton-place, and follow you about to every infernal picture-gallery till the greens and blues in their confounded landscapes gave me the vertigo, and to every twopenny-halfpenny flower-show, staring at azaleas and rhododendrons ; and then you turn round and tell me you’re engaged ! By —, Miss Luttrell, if you mean what you say, you’re the most brazen-faced flirt it was ever my bad luck to meet with in half-a-dozen London seasons !’

Elizabeth drew herself up, trembling with anger. What, did he dare insult her? And had she really been guilty? Conscience was slow to answer that question.

‘How dare you talk to me like that?’ she exclaimed. ‘I—I will never speak to you again as long as I live, Lord Pauly.’ A woman’s favourite threat in moments of extremity, and generally the prelude to a torrent of words.

‘By the right you’ve given me every day for the last six weeks. By the right which the world has assumed when it couples our names, as they are coupled by every one who knows us. Throw me over, if you like; but it will be the worse for you if you do, for every one will say it was I who jilted you. A woman can’t carry on as you’ve carried on, and then turn round and say, O, I beg your pardon, it was all a mistake; I’m engaged to somebody else.’ And then suddenly, with a still fiercer flash of anger, he demanded, ‘Who is he? Who is the man?’

‘The gentleman to whom I have the honour to be engaged is Mr. Forde, my father’s curate. Perhaps it would be better for you to make your complaint about my conduct to him.’

‘Egad, I should think he’d be rather astonished if I did enlighten him a little on that score! Your

father's curate? So it's for the sake of a beggarly curate you are going to throw me over the bridge.'

'You are at liberty to insult me, Lord Paulyn, but I must insist upon your refraining from any insolent mention of my future husband. And now, perhaps, as we quite understand each other, you will be good enough to let me go to my aunt.'

'Don't be in such a hurry, Miss Luttrell,' said the Viscount, white with anger. That he, Reginald Paulyn, should be rejected by any woman living, least of all by a country vicar's daughter, and in favour of a country curate! It was not to be endured. But of course she was not in earnest; this pretended refusal was only an elaborate coquetry. 'I'm—I'm not a bad-tempered man, that I am aware,' he went on, after struggling with his rising ire; 'but there are some things beyond any man's forbearance; and after leading me on as you have done—that you can look me in the face and tell me you're going to marry another man! I won't believe it of you; no, not from your own lips. Come, Elizabeth, be reasonable; drop all this nonsense. Never mind if there has been some kind of flirtation between you and Forde; let bygones be bygones; I won't quarrel with the past. But give me a straight answer, like a woman of the world. Remember, there's nothing you care

for in this world that I can't give you ; you were made to occupy a brilliant position, and I love you better than I ever loved any human creature.'

He took her hand, which she did not withdraw from him ; she let him hold it in his strong grasp, a poor little icy-cold unresisting hand. For the first time it dawned upon her that she had done him a great wrong.

'Do you really care for me?' she asked with a serious wondering air. 'I am so sorry, and begin to see that I have done wrong ; I ought to have been more candid. But indeed, Lord Pauly, it is my aunt's fault. I begged her to tell you of my engagement. I would have told you myself eyen, only,' with a feeble little laugh, 'I could hardly volunteer such a piece of information ; it would have been so presumptuous to suppose that you were in any danger from our brotherly and sisterly acquaintance.'

'Brotherly and sisterly be hanged !' said the Viscount ; 'you must have known that I doated on you. God knows I've let you see it plain enough. I've never hid my light under a bushel.'

After this there came another brief silence. Elizabeth looking thoughtfully at the rippling water, Lord Pauly watching her face with a gloomy air.

'Come,' he said at last, 'what is it to be ? Are

you going to throw me over for the sake of this curate fellow? Are you going to bury yourself alive in a country parsonage, teaching a pack of snivelling children psalm-singing? You've tasted blood; you know something of what life is. Come, Lizzie, be just to yourself and me. Write this Forde fellow a civil letter telling him you've changed your mind.'

'Not for Egypt,' said Elizabeth, turning her flashing eyes upon him—eyes which a moment before had been gazing dreamily at the river. 'You do not know how I love him. Yes, I love the world too,' she went on, as if answering that sordid plea by which the Viscount had endeavoured to sustain his suit; 'I do love the world. Its pleasures are all so new to me, and I have enjoyed my life unspeakably since I've been in London, yes, in spite of being parted from him. But I could no more give him up than I could cut my heart out of my body, and live. I am quite willing to admit that I have done wrong;—this with an air of proud humility which was very rare in Elizabeth Luttrell—'I beg your pardon, Lord Paulyn; I entreat you to forgive me, and accept my friendship instead of my love. You have been very kind to me, very indulgent to all my caprices and tempers, and believe me I am not ungrateful.'

'Forgive you!' he echoed, with a harsh laugh;

‘be your friend, when I had made up my mind to be your husband ! Rather hard lines. However, I suppose friendship must count for something ; and as you prefer the notion of psalm-singing and three sermons a Sunday to a house in May Fair, a yacht at Cowes, a racing-box at Newmarket, and stables in Yorkshire—I should have liked to show you my Yorkshire stables and stud farm,’ with a dreamy fondness—‘as you have made your choice, I suppose I must abide by it. And we’ll be friends, Lizzie. I may call you Lizzie, mayn’t I ? It’s only one of the privileges of friendship.’

‘ You may call me anything you like, if you’ll only promise never to renew this subject, and to forgive me for having unwittingly deceived you.’

The Viscount clasped her hand in both of his, then touched it with his lips for the first time. And as he kissed the little white hand, with a fond lingering pressure, he vowed a vow ; but whether of friendship and fealty, or of passionate, treacherous, selfish love, was a secret hidden in the soul of the Viscount himself.

Elizabeth accepted the kiss as a pledge of fidelity, and anon began to talk of indifferent subjects with a somewhat forced gaiety, as if she would have made believe that there had been no love-scene between

Lord Pauly and herself. They left the landing-place, and strolled slowly on to join the Major and aunt Chevenix, who were both sorely weary of their enforced meanderings. The matron smiled upon Elizabeth with the smile of triumph ; she had seen those two motionless figures from afar as she paced the other end of the long terrace with her companion, and assured herself that the Viscount had come to the point.

Now, as they came towards her walking side by side with a friendly air, she told herself that all was well. Elizabeth had renounced the ways of foolishness, and had accepted that high fortune which a bounteous destiny had reserved for her.

‘I said it when she was still in pinafores,’ thought Mrs. Chevenix ; ‘that girl was born to be a peeress.’

CHAPTER IV.

‘The company is “mix’d” (the phrase I quote is
As much as saying, they’re below your notice);
For a “mix’d” company implies that, save
Yourself and friends, and half a hundred more,
Whom you may bow to without looking grave,
The rest are but a vulgar set, the bore
Of public places, where they basely brave
The fashionable stare of twenty score
Of well-bred persons, call’d “*The World*,” but I,
Although I know them, really don’t know why.’

BITTER, with unutterable bitterness, was the disappointment of aunt Chevenix, when at breakfast next morning she was made acquainted with the actual state of affairs. Lord Paulyn had verily proposed, and had been rejected.

‘To say that you are mad, Elizabeth, is to say nothing,’ exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix, casting herself back in her chair and regarding her niece with a stony gaze, egg-spoon in hand; ‘you were *that* when you accepted Mr. Forde. But *this* is a besotted idiotcy for which even your previous folly had not prepared me.’

‘ You surely did not think that I should jilt Mr. Forde ?’

‘ I surely did not think you would refuse Lord Paulyne,’ echoed her aunt; ‘ a girl of your tastes—the very last of young women to marry a person in Mr. Forde’s position. Upon my word, Elizabeth, it is too bad, positively cruel, after the pride I have felt in you, the money I have spent upon you even, though I am above alluding to that. Your conduct is a death-blow to all my hopes.’ And here Mrs. Chevenix wept real tears, which she wiped despondently from her powdered cheeks.

‘ Pray don’t cry, auntie. I am something like a man in that respect; I can’t bear the sight of tears. I am very sorry for having disappointed you, but it would be hardly a fair thing to Lord Paulyne to marry him while my heart belongs entirely to some one else, to say nothing of Malcolm himself—’

‘ Malcolm!’ exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix with profound disgust. ‘ To think that I should have a niece—my favourite niece too—capable of marrying a man called Malcolm.’

‘ I’m sorry you don’t like his name, auntie. To my ear it is music.’

‘ Yes, like the Scotch bagpipes, I suppose,’ said the elder lady in accents of withering scorn.

‘And now, dearest auntie, let there be no quarrelling between us,’ pleaded Elizabeth. ‘I daresay it is disappointing to you for me to settle down into a country clergyman’s wife, after all my grand talk about marrying well, and riding through the world in my own barouche, over people’s bodies, as it were, like the lady in Roman history. I did not know my own heart when I talked like that. I did not think that I should ever be weak enough to love anybody fifty times better than carriages and horses. Please let us be friends,’ she went on coaxingly, and kneeling down by the offended matron. ‘Lord Paulyn has forgiven me, and he and I are to be excellent friends for the rest of our lives. Perhaps he will give Malcolm a living; I daresay he has three or four handsome benefices among his possessions.’

‘Friends indeed!’ cried Mrs. Chevenix contemptuously; ‘I’m sure I thought last night that it was all settled, and even began to think of your trousseau. I never in my life had such a disappointment.’

Little by little, however, the matron’s indignation, or the outward show of that passion, abated, and she permitted her wounded spirits to be soothed by Elizabeth’s caresses. Happily for the damsel, the business of life, that business of pleasure which sometimes involves more wear and tear of mind and

body than the most serious pursuit of wealth or fame, must needs go on. Once in the whirlpool of Mrs. Cinqmars' set, and there was no escape for Elizabeth and her chaperon ; all their other engagements were as nothing to that lady's demands upon their time, and Mrs. Chevenix, for some unexplained reason, had entered upon a close alliance with the mistress of the Rancho.

'I did not think Mrs. Cinqmars was at all your style, auntie,' Elizabeth said, wondering that this new-fledged friendship should be so strong upon the wing.

'Mrs. Cinqmars' style may not be faultless, but she is one of the best-natured little women I ever met, and has the art of making her house most delightful,' replied Mrs. Chevenix decisively.

'I think we ought to take our brass bedsteads out to Fulham, and camp under the trees, now the warm weather has set in. We almost live there, as it is,' said Elizabeth.

There was some foundation for this remark in the fact that Mrs. Chevenix and her niece were oftener at the Rancho than anywhere else. Mrs. Cinqmars devoted all the forces of her being to the pursuit of pleasure ; and as these gaieties and hospitalities assisted Mr. Cinqmars not a little in the pursuit of

gain, the lady was allowed the free exercise of her talents in the art of making people forget that life was meant for anything graver or loftier than a perpetual talking of small-talk and quaffing of iced cups in the summer sunshine, now under the striped awning of a barge gliding up the sunlit river, anon in the cool glades of some primeval forest like Windsor or Burnham Beeches. If the destiny of mankind began and ended in picnics, water-parties, kettle-drums, and private theatricals, Mrs. Cinqmars would have been among the leaders of the world ; but, unfortunately for the lady, those delights are fleeting as the bubbles on the river, and, however wide their circle spreads, make but brief impressions, and are forgotten after a season or two. Mr. and Mrs. Cinqmars might have commemorated themselves in a pyramid as high as Pharaoh's, built out of empty champagne bottles ; but so ungrateful are the butterfly race they fed, that almost the only record of their hospitality at the end of a season was a yard full of empty bottles, and the cases, which an odd man chopped up for firewood.

While the season lasted, however, Mrs. Cinqmars drank freely of pleasure's sparkling cup, and found no bitterness even in the lees thereof. She rarely left a blank day in her programme. Every week

brought its water-party or its picnic. Every morning found her breakfast-tray—she did not leave her room till the business of the day began—piled high with notes of acceptance or refusal in answer to her coquettish little notes of invitation. She was not a person who sent meaningless cards ‘requesting,’ but wrote dainty little letters on monogram-embazoned paper, full of familiar nothings, breathing the warmest friendship.

‘The season is so short,’ she used to say pensively, ‘one cannot do too much while the fine weather lasts.’

After that day at Epsom Mrs. Cinqmars made no party to which she did not invite her dearest Miss Luttrell. She was eager for the society of her dearest Mrs. Chevenix at all her dinners and afternoons; but there were picnics and water-parties which might be too fatiguing for that dearest friend, on which occasions she begged to be intrusted with the care of her sweet Miss Luttrell—a privilege the matron was not slow to accord. Dinners and dances in Tyburnia were declined with ruthlessness in favour of Mrs. Cinqmars—ay, even a dinner in Eaton-square, at the abode of a millionaire baronet, in the iron trade.

‘Upon my word, auntie, I don’t care about going so much to Mrs. Cinqmars,’ Elizabeth remonstrated.

‘I certainly do enjoy myself more at her parties than anywhere else, but I hardly think Malcolm would like me to spend so much time in that kind of society.’

‘You had better send a statement of all your engagements to Mr. Forde, and allow him to direct your movements,’ replied Mrs. Chevenix; and mingled feelings, the fear of ridicule, and her own inclination, which drew her strongly towards Henley and Virginia Water, kept Elizabeth silent.

Mr. Forde’s remonstrances about the length of her visit had abated of late, for the Curate had been summoned to Scotland, to attend the sick bed of one of his few remaining kindred, his father’s only brother, an old man to whom he was warmly attached. His letters came now from the North, and were only brief records of sufferings from which there seemed no hope of other relief than death. He had no time to write at length to his betrothed, and no spirits for letter-writing. ‘I don’t want to sadden you, dearest,’ he wrote, ‘and therefore make my letters of the briefest, for my mind is full of our patient, and the quiet fortitude with which he endures this protracted trial, too full even for those happy thoughts of the future which have brightened my life of late.. But I do look forward to our meeting, Lizzie; whatever

sorrow may lie between this hour and that. And I hope to hear speedily of your return to the West.'

'Do you know if this uncle is likely to leave him any money?' Mrs. Chevenix inquired, with a languid interest, when she was informed of Mr. Forde's movements. A few hundreds a year could make little difference in that poverty-stricken career which Elizabeth had chosen for herself. It would be but as a grain of sand, when weighed against a viscount's coronet and half-a-dozen estates.

'I believe Malcolm will be richer, auntie. There is a small estate in Scotland that must come to him.'

'A small estate in Scotland, where land lets at ten shillings an acre, I suppose. Or perhaps it is all waste, mere sand and heather. But what does it matter? You have chosen to go through life a pauper. It is only a question of a crust of bread more or less.'

There was hardly a necessity for Elizabeth to hurry back to Hawleigh, to the untimely cutting off of all these summer delights, when Mr. Forde was away. She thought how dreary the place would seem without him. Gertrude, Diana, Blanche, with their stock phrases and their perennial commonplaces, and their insignificant scraps of gossip about the Haw-

leigh gentry ; the dull old High-street ; the shop-windows she had looked at so often, till she knew every item of the merchandise. She thought of going over all the old ground again with a shudder. ‘Life in a convent would be gayer,’ she thought ; ‘the nuns could not *all* be Gertrudes and Dianas.’

So she wrote a dutiful letter to her betrothed, full of sympathy with his sorrow, and informing him that she was beginning to grow a little tired of London, and would go back to the West directly she heard of his return. ‘Don’t ask me to go any sooner, Malcolm,’ she said ; ‘the place would seem horrible to me without you. I want your face to be the first to welcome me home. I think sometimes of the days when we shall have our own home, and I shall stand at the gate watching for you.’

The Derby-day was a thing of the remote past, and Henley regatta was over, before Elizabeth received notice of Mr. Forde’s return. She had seen Lord Paulyn almost daily during the interval, and his friendship had never wavered. He was still her devoted slave, still patient under her scornful speeches, still eager to gratify her smallest caprice, still a kind of barrier between her and all other worship. Serene in the consciousness of having done her duty, of hav-

ing, with a fortitude unknown to the common order of womankind, rejected all the advantages of wealth and rank, she saw no peril to herself or her admirer in that frivolous kind of intimacy which she permitted to him. It was an understood thing that she was to be another man's wife—that the end of the season was to be her everlasting farewell to worldly pleasures. Lord Paulyn appeared to accept his position with gentlemanlike resignation. He would even speak of his happier rival sometimes, with but little bitterness, with a good-humoured contempt, as of an inferior order of being. Elizabeth thought he was cured.

Henley regatta and the longest day were over, but the summer was yet in its prime—the nights knew not darkness, only a starry twilight betwixt sundown and sunrise.

‘How tired the sun must be by the end of the season,’ said Elizabeth, ‘keeping such late hours, and always glaring down upon races and regattas and flower-shows and garden-parties !’

‘Don’t pity him : he’s such a lazy beggar, and so fond of skulking behind the clouds on rainy days,’ answered Lord Paulyn. ‘I wish we could shuffle out of our engagements as easily as he shirks his.’

Mrs. Cinqmars, who was never happy without some grand event in preparation, had hardly given herself time to breathe after her water-party at Henley—a luncheon for five-and-twenty people on board a gilded barge, towed up the river from Maidenhead—when she was up to her eyes in the arrangement of private theatricals for the tenth of July—a festivity which was to mark the close of her hospitalities.

‘We start for Hombourg on the twelfth,’ she said, with a sigh; ‘and as I’ve been going up like a rocket all the season, I don’t want to come down like a stick at the last. So, you see, our theatricals must be a success, Lord Paulyn. It’s not to be a common drawing-room business, you know, but a regular affair, for the benefit of the Asylum for the Widows of Indigent Stockbrokers. Tickets a guinea each. A few reserved fauteuils at two guineas.’

‘Do you mean to say you’re going to let a herd of strangers into your house?’ inquired the Viscount with amazement. ‘Why, you’ll have the swell-mob after your plate!’

‘The tickets will be only disposed of by our friends, you obtuse creature,’ said Mrs. Cinqmars; ‘but it’s not half so much fun acting before a lot of people you see every day, as doing it in real earnest

for a benevolent purpose. I shall expect you to sell something like fifty-pounds worth of tickets, and to bring all the heavy swells you can scrape together. I want the affair to be really brilliant. But this is not the point we have to discuss to-day. Before we can print our programmes or stir a step in the business, we must definitively settle our pieces, and cast them.'

This speech was uttered in a friendly little gathering beneath the umbrage of perfumed limes, the river flashing in the foreground, a few of Mrs. Cinqmars' dearest friends, of both sexes—the Viscount, Major Bolding, a young man in the War Office with a tenor voice and light hair parted in the middle, the young lady with raven ringlets, a fair and dumpy young person whose husband was in America, and Elizabeth Luttrell—seated in friendly conclave round a rustic table, provided with pens, ink, and paper; for it is quite impossible to achieve an arrangement of this kind without an immense waste of penmanship and letter-paper. There was the usual confusion of tongues, everybody thinking he or she knew more about private theatricals than any one else—Major Bolding, because the fellows in his regiment had once got up something at Aldershott; the dumpy young

person, because she had acted charades with her sisters in the nursery when she was 'a mite'; the tenor in the War Office, because his father had known Charles Mathews the elder; the contralto, because she had gone to school with a niece of Mrs. Charles Kean's. Only Elizabeth acknowledged her ignorance. 'I know nothing about plays,' she said, 'except that I dote upon them.'

'Whatever play we choose, Lizzie, I mean you to be in it,' said Mrs. Cinqmars, and Elizabeth did not protest against the arrangement. She was enraptured at the thought of acting in a play—of living for one brief night the dazzling life of that fairy stage-world which was so new to her.

About a hundred plays were suggested, briefly discussed, and rejected. Mrs. Cinqmars seemed to know every dramatic work that had been written. Every one, except Elizabeth and Mr. Cinqmars, had his or her one idea, by which he or she stuck resolutely. Lord Paulyn voted for *Box and Cox*, and could not be persuaded to extend his ideas beyond that masterpiece. The tenor proposed *To oblige Benson*, because he knew some people who had acted it last Christmas down in Hertfordshire; 'and I'm told it went off remarkably well, you know,' he said;

' and people laughed a good deal, except one old gentleman in the front row, who went to sleep and snored.'

' You stupid people !' cried Mrs. Cinqmars ; ' don't go on harping upon one string. Those are mere insignificant farces ; and I want a grand piece that will play two hours and a half.'

After this came a string of suggestions, all alike useless.

' I only wish our men were a little better,' said Mrs. Cinqmars, with a despondent survey of her forces. ' There is a piece which I should like above all others ; but it wants good acting. There are not too many people in it, and no troublesome scenery. I mean *Masks and Faces*.'

Every one knew *Masks and Faces*, every one admired the play ; but the gentlemen were doubtful as to their capacity for the characters.

' I'll play nothing but Box,' said Lord Paulyn ; ' I think I could do that.'

' I don't mind what I do, as long as it's something to make the people laugh,' said Major Bolding.

' Then you'd better try tragedy,' suggested Mr. Hartley, the tenor.

' They're playing the piece at the Adelphi, Lizzie,'

said Mrs. Cinqmars, intent upon her own deliberations, and ignoring trivial interruptions. ' We'll all go to see it this evening. You shall play Peg Woffington. Major Bolding will do pretty well for Vane. O yes, you must do it; I'll coach you. Cinqmars and Mr. Hartley can play Triplet and Colley Cibber; you, Flory—to the dumpy young person—will make a capital Kitty Clive; and you, Lord Pauly, must play Sir Charles Pomiander, the villain. I can get a couple of newspaper men for Snarl and Soaper, the two critics. No remonstrances. I know you are all sticks; but we know what great things can be done by a bundle of sticks. You'll all learn your words perfectly without an hour's delay. Never mind the acting. We'll arrange that at rehearsal. The words and the dresses are the two great points. You must all look as if you had walked out of a picture by Ward or Frith. You'll call at the Adelphi this afternoon, Major, and engage half-a-dozen stalls for the rest of the week; and mind, I shall expect to see them occupied every night before the curtain goes up.'

After this came a great deal of discussion. Major Bolding declared his incapacity for sentimental comedy; Lord Pauly insisted that he could soar no higher than Box.

‘I don’t think I should break down in that business with the mutton-chop and rasher; and if I had plaid trousers with big checks, and a red wig, I think I might make them laugh a little,’ he said; ‘but my attempting a stage villain is too absurd. Why, I should have to scowl, shouldn’t I, and cork my eyebrows, and drag one foot behind the other when I walked?’

‘Nothing of the kind. Sir Charles is a light-comedy villain; only a slight modification of your own haw-haw style. You have only to see the piece acted half-a-dozen times or so. You shall have a wig and costume that will almost play the part for you.’

Lord Pauly groaned aloud. ‘Sit in a stiflin’ hot theatre six nights runnin’ to see the same fellers in the same play!’ he remonstrated.

‘Only a small sacrifice to dramatic art and the indigent stockbrokers’ widows,’ said Mrs. Cinqmars soothingly.

She was a determined little woman; and once having taken up the business, carried it through with unflagging energy.

The programmes were printed forthwith, on lace-bordered paper of palest rose colour, perfumed to distraction by the art of Rimmel.

Drawing-room Performance
AT THE RANCHO, FULHAM (THE RIVERSIDE VILLA OF
H. DU C. DE CINQMARS, ESQ.),
FOR THE
BENEFIT OF THE WIDOWS OF INDIGENT STOCKBROKERS
(Members of the House alone eligible).

MASKS AND FACES.

A Comedy by CHARLES READE and TOM TAYLOR.

Sir Charles Pomander	.	Lord PAULYN.
Mr. Vane	.	Major BOLDING.
Colley Cibber	.	Mr. HARTLEY.
Triplet	.	Mr. DU CHATELET DE CINQMARS.
James Quin	.	Mr. BEAUMONT.
Snarl	} <i>Critics.</i>	Mr. SLASHER.
Soaper		Mr. SLATER.
Mrs. Vane	.	Mrs. DU CHATELET DE CINQMARS.
Kate Clive	.	Mrs. DESBOROUGH.
Peg Woffington	.	Miss ELIZABETH LUTTRELL.

Tickets, to be obtained only from the Committee, one guinea.
A limited number of reserved fauteuils at two guineas.

Performance to commence at nine precisely. Carriages may be ordered for half-past eleven.

For five consecutive nights did Mrs. Cinqmars and her devoted slaves occupy the stalls of the Adelphi, gazing upon and listening to the performance of Mrs. Stirling, Mr. Benjamin Webster, and other accomplished masters of the dramatic art. The blood in the veins of the gallant Major ran cold, as the fast-congealing water-drops of an Alpine stream

among the frozen mountain tops, when he watched the movements and listened to the words of Mr. Vane, and considered that he, after his feeble fashion, must needs reflect the image of that skilful actor who sustained the part. But by diligent perusal of the comedy in the solitude of their own apartments, and by force of seeing the play five times running, and being urged to attention and interest by the energetic little state-manageress who sat between them, the Major on the one side, and the Viscount on the other, did ultimately arrive at some idea of what they were expected to do ; and when the first rehearsal took place at the Rancho, after the completion of these nightly studies, Mrs. Cinqmars pronounced herself very well satisfied with her company. She had beaten up recruits here and there in the mean time, and had filled her programme. The tickets had been selling furiously. Almost every one had heard of the Rancho ; and aspiring middle-class people who did not know Mrs. Cinqmars were glad of this opportunity of placing themselves upon a level with people who did. There was no rush of those lofty personages whom Mrs. Cinqmars had spoken of as 'heavy swells.' A good deal of solicitation would have been needed to bring these to share the free-and-easy hospitalities of the river-side villa ; but society on the lower ranges

parted freely with their guineas for gilt-edged tickets of delicate rose-coloured pasteboard, entitling them to behold the mysteries of that notorious abode. Lord Pauly, hard pressed by the energetic Flora, did contrive to enlist the sympathies of various horsey noblemen in the cause of the stockbrokers' widows—men who were curious, in their own words, to see 'how big a fool Pauly would make of himself'—but stately dowagers or patrician beauties he could gather none. Major Bolding, however, beat up the quarters of wealthy merchants and shipowners, and secured a handsome attendance of diamonds and millinery for the limited number of fauteuils; and although the aspiring soul of Mrs. Cinqmars languished for a more aristocratic assembly, she was tolerably contented with the idea of a gathering which would fill her spacious room, and in outward show would equal the best.

'If one has not what one loves, one must love what one has,' said the little woman, flinging back her flowing raven locks with a sigh of resignation. 'We've sold all the tickets, and that's a grand point, and we shall have at least a hundred pounds for the widows; odious snuffy old creatures, I daresay, and not worth half the trouble we are taking for them. A thousand thanks, Major, for your exertions in

Tyburnia, and to you, Lord Paulyn, for your labours at Tattersall's. I really think we shall make a success. Miss Luttrell is a magnificent Woffington.'

'Egad, she'd be magnificent in anything,' said the Viscount rapturously. 'I always think, if there ever was such a person as Helen, she must have been like Elizabeth Luttrell. She's such an out-and-out beauty. Don't you know in Homer, when she came out on the ramparts where the old men were sitting, though I daresay they had been abusing her like old boots before she showed up, the moment they saw her they knocked under, and thought a ten years' war was hardly too much to have paid for the privilege of looking at her. Elizabeth is just that kind of woman. It's no matter how she carries on, a man must adore her.'

'I say ditto to Mr. Burke,' said the Major.

'It's a pity she should marry a country parson, isn't it?' asked Mrs. Cinqmars, who had been made acquainted with Elizabeth's engagement by the damsel herself, in a moment of confidence.

'Fifty to one against that marriage ever coming off,' said the Major; 'a pretty girl always begins with a detrimental, just to get her hand in. I daresay those Gunning sisters in King George's time were engaged to some needy beggars before they came up

to London, and took the town by storm. I can't fancy Miss Luttrell settling down to the goody-goody kind of life, with a sanctimonious fellow in a white choker.'

'No, by Jove!' cried Lord Paulyn, 'I can fancy anything sooner than that. But she's just the sort of girl to do anything, however preposterous, if she once set her mind upon it.'

This was a fragment of confidential talk in Mrs. Cinqmars' boudoir, which at this period was littered with court swords, three-cornered hats, flowing peri-wigs, and other such paraphernalia. The important night came at last, in an interval of tropical weather, the thermometer at eighty-six in the shade, all the greensward in the parks burnt to a dismal tawny hue, arid as a simoom-blasted desert. Heavy insupportable weather, at which Anglo-Indians and other travellers in distant climes, from China to Peru, grumbled sorely, declaring that they had encountered nothing so oppressive as this sultry English heat in Bengal, or Japan, or Lima, or Honolulu, as the case might be. A damp, penetrating heat, as of a gigantic hot-house. London and her wide-spreading suburbs were wrapped in a dim shroud of summer mist, pale and impalpable as the ghost of some dead-and-gone November fog, and all the denizens of the vast city

seemed visibly dissolving, as in a Turkish bath. Threatening weather, with the perpetual menace of a thunderstorm impending in the leaden sky.

‘It will be rather too bad if the storm were to come to-night,’ said Mrs. Cinqmars, as she leaned against the embrasure of an open window languidly, after the last rehearsal, which had been prolonged to within a couple of hours of the performance. ‘But I shouldn’t at all wonder if it did. Hark at those horrible little birds twittering, as if they were saying, “O yes, it will come soon; it can’t keep off much longer; I feel it coming.” And how the laurel-leaves shiver !’

‘We’ve sold the tickets,’ said the Major philosophically; ‘the indigent widows will be none the worse off if it rains bucketfuls all the evening.’

‘Do you think that will reconcile me to our play being a failure?’ cried the lady indignantly. ‘As if those snuffy old things were the first consideration !’

‘But you do it for their sakes, you know.’

‘For their sakes ! Do you suppose I pay Madame Noire unheard-of prices for my dresses for their sakes ? I shall die of vexation if we’ve any empty benches.’

‘We’d better send a whip round to the clubs,’ said Major Bolding.

‘I don’t want a herd of men,’ exclaimed the

aggrieved manageress ; ‘ I want a brilliant-looking audience,—those Manchester and Liverpool women with their emeralds and diamonds. However, we’d better disperse at once, and begin to think of dressing. Two hours is not two much for putting on Pompadour costumes. Lizzie, you and I will have some tea and cold chicken in my room, if we can manage to eat ; and as for you, gentlemen, there will be dinner in half-an-hour in Mr. Cinqmars’ study. All the other rooms are confiscated to the interests of the widows.’

‘ Are the widows to see us act ?’ inquired Mr. Hartley. ‘ They ought, I think, in order to appreciate the effort we are making for them at its just value. It would be rather a clever move, by the way, a row of old women in black bonnets. Mrs. Cinqmars could point to them when she speaks her little epilogue : “ Behold, kind friends, the recipients of your bounty.” ’

‘ It will be quite enough to speak of them. And now, gentlemen, if you really mean to be dressed by nine o’clock, you’d better go to your rooms. Du Châtelet, be sure you come to me at a quarter to nine to go over your scenes for the very last time.’

Du Châtelet groaned. He was the Triplet of the piece, and had sorely toiled in his laudable desire to

reproduce the looks and tones of Mr. Webster. He had even sacrificed a handsome black moustache, which he felt to be a costly offering, on the shrine of Art.

It was nine o'clock, and the storm was still impending—still spreading its dark curtain between earth and the stars. But it had not come, and carriage after carriage, the chariots of Tyburnia and Ecclestonia, rolled round the gravel sweep before the broad portico of the Rancho. The *foyer* filled rapidly, with a pleasant rustling of silks and satins, a fluttering of plumes, and flashing of jewels, until the half-dozen rows of luxurious seats became a very flower-garden, the brilliant colours of the more costly sex only agreeably toned by the puritan garb of man.

The billiard-room had been fitted up as an auditorium, and by a skilful removal of the vast window which filled one end of the room, and opened on the garden, the apartment had been extended into a temporary shed beyond. This shed, with gently-sloping floor and sunk footlights, was the stage. The frame of the window, wreathed with flowering creepers which seemed to have grown up after the fashion of the famous beanstalk, formed the proscenium.

The brilliant light in the auditorium sank gently to a semi-darkness as the band, hidden in a little off-

room, attacked the overture to *Masaniello*. People had had just enough time to look about them before the lights went down, the women surveying one another's dresses, the men looking about for people they knew. Mrs. Cinqmars beheld her audience through a hole in the curtain, which Major Bolding had made with his penknife for her convenience, and was satisfied.

‘They look very well, don’t they?’ she asked. ‘You’d hardly think they were not the real thing—not hall-marked—only electro-plated.’

Mrs. Chevenix occupied one of the fauteuils, in a cool and somewhat juvenile costume of pale-gray silk and areophane, with pink ribbons, and a blonde Marie-Stuart cap surmounted with pink marabouts, pink marabouts edging her fan, pink swansdown on her gloves. Her own dress was new and had cost money, but the cost thereof was as nothing compared with the expense of Elizabeth’s satin train and point-lace-flounced petticoat, and the powdered wig which was to make her look like Madame de Pompadour in Boucher’s famous picture. Yet all this expenditure had the devoted aunt borne without grumbling, or only an occasional faint and plaintive sigh.

If there were sufficient recompense for this outlay in Elizabeth’s triumph, Mrs. Chevenix received such

recompense without stint. From the first moment to the last of that performance the girl was triumphant, resplendent with beauty and genius, giving her whole heart and soul to the magic of the stage, living, breathing, thinking, as Peg Woffington. The mediocrity of her fellow-actors mattered nothing to her. They spoke the words they had to speak, so that no hitch arose in the stage business, and that was all she needed to sustain the illusion of the scene. There was passion enough and force enough in her own soul to have animated a theatre ; there was an electricity as subtle as the electricity in the overcharged atmosphere, a magnetic force which inspired and excited, instead of depressing.

Mrs. Cinqmars revelled in the sentimentalities of Mabel Vane ; rolled her large eyes and flung about her superb hair—she would wear no wig to conceal that natural abundance—to her heart's content, and made a graceful little heroine of the lachrymose school. But Elizabeth was the very creature one could fancy Margaret Woffington in her prime—the generous, reckless, audacious beauty, proud of her power over the hearts of men, brimming over with life and genius, but with unfathomable depths of tenderness lurking beneath that brilliant surface.

Tyburnia and Ecclestonia, and all the men about town who formed the staple of Mr. and Mrs. Cinqmars' set, applauded with a unanimity that for once in a way came from the heart. They felt that this was verily dramatic art, hardly the less finished because it was the fruit of only a fortnight's study. The actress had picked up the technicalities of her part during those studious nights in the theatre; inspiration and a fresh and ardent love of art had done the rest, and the impersonation was as perfect as any amateur performance can possibly be, with all the added charm of freshness and sincerity which can hardly accompany the profound experience of professional training. An actress who had trodden the beaten round of the drama, more or less like a horse in a mill, could surely never fling herself with such passionate feeling into one part as this girl, to whom the magic of the stage was new.

Mr. Cinqmars quavered and sniffed and snivelled in the character of Triplet, with an abject senility which would have been senile in a great-grandfather of ninety, but copied the stage business with some dexterity, and won his share of applause. Lord Paulyn and Major Bolding were dressed superbly, and managed to get through their work with credit to themselves and the stage-manageress; and as coffee

and Neapolitan ices were lavishly administered between the acts, without any toll being exacted there-upon for the widows, the aristocracy of commerce in the two-guinea fauteuils were inclined to think they had received fair value for their money. As for the herd of young men who blocked the back of the auditorium, where there was little more than standing room, they were simply in ecstasies. The girl's beauty and genius fired their souls. They protested vehemently that she ought to go on the stage, that she would take the town by storm, and much more to the same effect; forgetting that this flame which burned so brilliantly to-night might be only a meteoric light, and that although a clever young woman, with an ardent nature, may for once in her life fling herself heart and soul into a stage-play, and by a kind of inspiration dispense with the comprehension and experience that can only come from professional training, it is no reason she should be able to repeat her triumph, and to go on repeating it *ad libitum*. Never again in Elizabeth Luttrell's existence was she to live the delicious life of the stage, to lose the sense of her personality in the playwright's creation, to act and think and be glad and sorry with an imaginary creature, the centre of an imaginary world.

Among the crowd of white neckties and swallow-

tailed coats at the end of the room, there was one gentleman who stood near the door, with his back against the wall, a tall immovable figure, and who seemed to know nobody. He was taller by half a head than the majority of the men standing in the crowded space behind the last row of seats, and he was able to survey the stage across the carefully-parted hair of the gentleman in front of him. This gentleman had a good deal to say about Elizabeth Luttrell, to which the stranger listened intently, with a somewhat moody countenance.

‘Yes,’ said this fopling to his friend, in the interval between the second and third act—the stranger had only entered the room towards the close of the second—‘yes, it’s a great match for her, of course; only a country parson’s daughter, without a sixpence, except anything she may get from her aunt, Mrs. Chevenix, the widow of a man who was a bishop, or a judge, or something—’

‘Is it a settled thing?’ asked the other.

‘Of course it is. Why, they go everywhere together. I was introduced to her at the Derby; he drove her down in his drag, with Mrs. Cinqmars to play Propriety, on the *obscurum facere per obscurius* principle, I suppose. And you’ll find him here continually, dancing attendance upon Miss

Luttrell, and spooning to an extent that is humiliating to one's sense of manhood.'

'I didn't think that was in Pauly's line; I thought he went in for race-horses and prize yachts, and that kind of thing.'

'Yes; there's the rub. This is his first appearance in the character of a love-sick swain; and like a patient who takes the measles late in life, he exhibits the disease in its most aggravated form.'

'There's not much in him at the best of times,' said the other, with the air of a man whose own intellectual gifts were of the highest order, and who therefore surveyed mankind from an altitude. 'Do you think she likes him?'

'Do I think she is in full possession of her senses?' answered his friend, laughing; 'and that, being so, she would be likely to turn up her nose at such a position as he can give her? There's hardly a richer man than Pauly about town — bar the Marquis of Westminster. The love of money is an hereditary vice in his family, and his ancestors have scraped and hoarded from generation to generation. He is one of the few gentlemen who contrive to make money on the turf. The bookmen hate him like poison. He's a lamb they seldom have the privilege of skinning. There isn't a deeper card out; and I

can't say I envy that lovely girl the life she's likely to lead with him, when she's his own property and he gets tired of spooning. But for all that I don't believe there's a girl in London would have refused him.'

Pleasant intelligence this for the tall stranger, whose name was Malcolm Forde.

CHAPTER V.

*‘Et je songeais comme la femme oublie,
Et je sentais un lambeau de ma vie
Qui se déchirait lentement.’*

MR. FORDE had come up from Scotland on the tenth of July, intending to surprise Elizabeth by his unexpected appearance in Eaton-place. He had fancied her bright look of rapture as she came into the room and saw him, after having been told only that a gentleman from Hawleigh wished to see her—the look she had given him so many times during the brief happy fortnight that followed their betrothal ; those happy days in which they had enjoyed for but too short a space the privileges of plighted lovers, had walked alone together on the dull March afternoon, when the Curate’s labours allowed him such a blessed interval, and had talked of the future they were to share—a lowly destiny, but with the light of true love shining upon it.

Thus had he thought of his betrothed during the tedious journey from the North, tedious though he

travelled express for the greater part of the way. He came fresh from the performance of a mournful duty, for only two days ago he had read the funeral service above the remains of his father's brother, the bachelor uncle who had been almost a second father to him. He had not even written to tell Elizabeth of his uncle's death. It would be easier to tell her when they met. He had made all his plans. He meant to stay in London for a few days, while Elizabeth wound up her visit, and then to take her back to Devonshire with him. And then it would be time to think of their wedding-day. He was richer by some four hundred a year since his uncle's death, and he had lately received the offer of a very fair living in the north of England. Since he had surrendered his old heroic idea of his ministry, and had determined that his lines were to be cast in pleasant places, there was really nothing to hinder the realisation of his wishes.

Only when he was rattling along in a cab between Euston-square and Eaton-place did he bethink himself that Elizabeth would, in all probability, be out. It was nearly nine o'clock, and she went out so much, as her letters informed him. He could hardly hope to be so fortunate as to find her at home. And then he reproached himself for this childish foolish-

ness of his in wishing to surprise her, instead of telegraphing the announcement of his advent, as a sensible man would have done.

‘Do love and folly always go hand in hand?’ he wondered.

His forebodings of disappointment were fully realised. ‘Not at home,’ said Mrs. Chevenix’s single-handed indoor servant, a man whose pompous bearing might have impressed strangers with the idea that he had an under-butler and a staff of accomplished footmen for his vassals. ‘Not expected home till late this evening.’

Mr. Forde had alighted from his cab, and stood in the stuccoed porch despondent.

‘Have you any idea where they’re gone?’ he asked.

Any idea indeed! Why, the butler was as familiar with his mistress’s engagements as that lady herself.

‘They are gone to the hamachure theatricals at the Rancho, Mr. Cinkmarsh’s place, at Fulham.’

‘Amateur theatricals!’ repeated Malcolm hopelessly.

‘Yes,’ replied the butler, who was of a communicative disposition; ‘my missus’s niece, Miss Luttrell, hacks the principal character; and my missus’s maid, as has seen her rehearsalling, and has gone down to

dress her this evening, says she do hack wonderful, jest like the regular thing, only not so low. It's a pity you didn't buy a ticket, sir, as you're a friend of the fambly.'

Private theatricals, and his wife-elect the centre of observation ! He was not strait-laced or puritanical in his ideas, but this performance hardly seemed to him in harmony with the part she had elected to play in the drama of life. But she had been minded to taste the cup of pleasure, and she was evidently drinking its strongest waters. She had told him nothing of these amateur theatricals — a curious reticence.

'Buy a ticket,' he repeated, echoing the friendly butler. 'Do you mean that tickets have been sold ? It is a public business, then ?'

'Well, sir, it is and it isn't, as you may say. The performance is for the benefick of a charitable institooshun—the hindignant widows, and Mrs. Cink-marsh have kindly lent her 'ouse for the occasion, and the tickets have been only sold by the committee, so you see it's public from one pint of view, and private from the other.'

'Where could I get a ticket?' asked the Curate moodily. This public exhibition, this playing at charity, was just the very last thing he could have

desired for his future wife, just the very thing he would have forbidden at any cost had he been afforded the opportunity of forbidding it.

‘And to keep it hidden from me,’ he thought; ‘a bad beginning for that perfect trust which was to reign between us.’

‘I don’t know as you could get one anywhere’s to-night, sir,’ replied the butler thoughtfully, ‘unless I was to get it for you. My missus is on the committee, and I know she had a lot of tickets to sell, and kep’ em up to yesterday in a china basket in the drawring-room. If they’re there still, I might take the liberty of gettin’ one for you; bein’ for a charitable purpose, I don’t think missus would objeck to my disposin’ of one.’

‘Get me one, then, like a good fellow.’

‘The tickets are a guinea heach,’ said the butler doubtfully, thinking this eager gentleman might ask for credit.

Mr. Forde took a handful of loose money from his pocket.

‘Here are thirty shillings,’ he said; ‘a guinea for the ticket, and the balance for your trouble.’

The man was gratified by this donation, for in these degenerate days vails are an uncertain quantity. He produced the ticket speedily, instructed Mr. Forde

as to the nearest way to the Rancho, guarded the wheel of the hansom as he got into it, and delivered the Curate's address to the charioteer with as grand an air as if he had been instructing the coachman of an archbishop.

'British Hotel, Cockspur-street,' he said, and thither Mr. Forde was driven by way of Belgrave-square and Birdcage-walk. A *nota bene* on the gilt-edged ticket informed him that full dress was indispensable.

He dined hastily in the deserted coffee-room—a sorry dinner, for he was in that frame of mind in which dining is the most dismal mockery—a mere sacrifice to the conventionalities—dined, and then went to his room and dressed hurriedly, with his thoughts strangely disturbed by this trivial business of the private theatricals.

But it was not trivial—for Elizabeth's reticence had been a tacit deception—it was not trivial, for unless she had been utterly wanting in love's truthful instinct, she must have known that this public exhibition of herself would be of all things the most hateful to him.

He was not a tyrant—he had never meant to tyrannise over this fair young creature who had made him love her, in very spite of his own will. But he

had meant to mould her into the shape of his still fairer ideal—the woman whose claim to manly worship was something higher than the splendour of her eyes or the golden glory of her hair—the perfect woman, nobly planned. He had fondly hoped that in Elizabeth there was the material for such a woman—that he had only to play the sculptor in order to develop undreamt-of graces from this peerless block of marble.

There were some letters waiting for him at the British—letters which had been sent on from Lenorgie, where they arrived after his departure. He had spent the day and night after the funeral with a friend in Edinburgh, where he had business to transact.

Two were mere business epistles ; the third was in a hand that was strange to him—rather a singular hand, with straight up and down letters, but of an angular scratchy type, which he felt must be feminine. It bore the postmark of Hawleigh. It was that snake in the grass, an anonymous letter.

‘ Mr. Forde will be perhaps surprised to learn that Miss Luttrell has given much encouragement to an aristocratic admirer during her stay in London. She has been seen on the front seat of Lord Pauly’s

four-in-hand, returning from Epsom races : a circumstance which has occasioned some talk among the straitlaced inhabitants of Hawleigh. This friendly hint is sent by a sincere well-wisher.

‘Hawleigh, July 7th.’

‘An aristocratic admirer—Lord Paulyn ! She has suffered her name to be associated with his so much as to give an excuse for this venomous scrawl ! I will not believe it. The venom is self-engendered. This vile letter is from some envious woman who hates her for all the gifts that render her so much more charming than other women.’

He crushed the venomous scrawl in his strong hand, and thrust it into the depths of a remote pocket. Yet, however mean the spirit of the anonymous slanderer, however contemptible the slander, it stung him not the less, as such venom does sting, in spite of himself.

‘I shall see her face to face,’ he thought, ‘in an hour or two—shall be able to scold her for her folly, and take her to my heart for her penitence ; and be angry with her, and forgive her, and adore her in the space of a minute ; and I shall see the scorn in her proud eyes when I tell her she has been accused of encouraging my rival.’

The drive to the Rancho gave Mr. Forde ample leisure for thought ; for going over and over the same ground with an agonising repetition of the same ideas ; for the amplification of those vague doubts, those little clouds in love's heaven, no bigger than a man's hand, until they grew wide enough to darken all the horizon. The shades of Fulham seemed endless. He stopped the driver more than once to ask if he were not going wrong ; but the man told him No : he knew Bishop's-lane well enough, close agen Putney-bridge ; and the locality of the Rancho, as indicated by Mr. Forde's ticket, was Bishop's-lane.

They drove into the lane at last, a dismal by-road between high walls, just wide enough for a couple of carriages to pass each other, with imminent peril of grazing the wheels or the horses against a wall. One could hardly have expected to find a suburban paradise in such a neighbourhood ; and in spite of his preoccupation, Mr. Forde looked about him with surprise as the hansom dashed in at an open gateway, made a swift circuit of a dark shrubbery of almost tropical luxuriance, and anon drew up before a long low house, lighted like a fairy palace.

He gave his ticket to a functionary who looked like a professional boxkeeper, and was admitted to a

spacious chamber filled to overflowing with a fashionable-looking audience. The play was more than half over—there was only standing-room—and the central figure of the group on the brilliantly-lighted stage, the focus of every eye, was the girl he loved—the perfect woman, nobly planned, &c.

He was but mortal, so he could not withhold his admiration of her grace and beauty, and was half-inclined to forgive her because she was so lovely and gracious a creature. Then the curtain fell at the close of the second act, and the men in front of him began to talk of her, and he heard what the world thought of Elizabeth Luttrell.

The blow almost stunned him. He heard much more than has been recorded; heard how men talked of his perfect woman; heard Mrs. Chevenix's manœuvres freely discussed, and Elizabeth's coöperation in all the matron's schemes spoken of as an established fact. His first and almost irresistible impulse was to knock the slanderers down. He felt as unregenerately-minded upon this point as if he had come fresh from the mess-table, his brain fired with wine and laughter. But he conquered the inclination, and stood quietly by, and heard from the lips of some half-dozen speakers what the world thought of the woman he loved. It was not that anything specially ill-natured

was said ; the men hardly knew that their remarks were derogatory to womanly dignity. It was their way of discussing such topics. But for Malcolm Forde it meant the ruin of that new scheme of life which he had made for himself. The airy fabric built by hope and love perished, like an enchanted city that melts into thin air at the breaking of a spell. He did not for a moment suspend his judgment, did not stay his wrath to consider how much or how little justification there might be for this careless talk.

These men spoke of facts—spoke of Elizabeth's engagement to the Viscount as a fact concerning which there could be no doubt. And she had doubtless given them ample justification for this idea. She had been constantly seen in his society. He 'spooning'—odious word!—in a manner that made his passion obvious to the eyes of all men.

Could he take this woman—her purity for ever tarnished by such contact—home to his heart? Was such a woman—who, with her faith plighted to him, could surrender herself to all the follies of the town, and link her name with yonder profligate—was such a woman worthy of the sacrifice he had been prepared to make for her—the sacrifice of the entire scheme of his life; theory and practice alike abandoned for her sake?

‘She would have made me a sensuous fool,’ he thought; ‘content to dawdle through life as her father has done, living at my ease, and making coals and beef and blankets the substitute for earnest labour among my flock. What might she not have made of me if my eyes had not been opened in time? I loved her so weakly.’

He put his passion already in the past tense. He had no thought of the possibility of his forgiving the woman who had deceived him so basely.

‘Of course she meant all the time to marry Lord Paulyn, if he proposed to her. But in the mean while, for the mere amusement of an idle hour, she made love to me,’ he thought bitterly, remembering that nothing had been farther from his thoughts than proposing to Elizabeth when she laid in wait for him that March night, and cut off his retreat for ever with the fatal magic of her beauty, and the tones and looks that went straight to his heart.

He must see her as soon as the play was over, must cast her out of his life at once and for ever, must make a swift sudden end of every link between them.

‘I might write to her,’ he thought; ‘but perhaps it would be better for us to meet once more face to face. If it is possible for her to justify herself, she

shall not be without the opportunity for such justification. But I know that it is impossible.'

When the curtain had fallen for the last time, and Elizabeth had curtseyed her acknowledgment of a shower of bouquets, and the enthusiasm in the parterre was still at its apogee, Mr. Forde departed. Not to-night would he break in upon her new existence. Let her taste all the delights of her triumph. To-morrow would be time enough for the few quiet words that were needed for his eternal severance from the woman he had loved.

CHAPTER VI.

‘Since there’s no help, come, let us kiss and part:
 Nay, I have done; you get no more of me;
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart,
 That thus so cleanly I myself can free;
Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,
 And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows
 That we one jot of former love retain.’

ELIZABETH was sitting alone in the shady back drawing-room on the morning after her triumph, carelessly robed in white muslin, pale, exhausted, languid as the lady in Hogarth’s ‘Marriage à la Mode.’ Mrs. Chevenix was recruiting her forces, mental and physical, by prolonged and placid slumbers; but Elizabeth was not of the order of being who can sleep off the fumes of dissipation so easily. Her brief night had been a perpetual fever; the voice of adulation still in her ears; the lights, the faces of the crowd, still before her dazzled eyes; the passion and feeling of Peg Woffington still racking her heart. ‘I wonder actresses don’t all die young,’ she thought, as

she tossed her weary head from side to side, vainly seeking slumber's calm haven.

Now she was lying on the sofa, prostrate, an unread novel in her hand, a cup of tea on a tiny table by her side, a fan and scent-bottle close at hand, for she had taken to her aunt's manner of sustaining life in its feebler moments.

She threw aside her novel presently, and unfurled her fan.

'I wish I were really an actress,' she thought; 'that would be a life worth living: to hear that thunder of applause every night, to see every eye fixed upon one, a vast audience listening with a breathless air: and to move in a strange world—a world of dreams—and to love, and suffer, and despair, and rejoice, within the compass of a couple of hours. Yes, that is life!'

She smiled to herself as she wondered what her lover would think of such a life.

'I shall tell him all about it now that it is over,' she said to herself. 'If I had told him before, he would have given his veto against the whole business, I daresay. But he can hardly be very angry when I make a full confession of my misdemeanour, especially as it was for a charity. And I think he will be a little proud of my success, in spite of himself.'

There had been a dance at the Rancho after the general public had dispersed, and Elizabeth had been the star of the evening, the object of everybody's outspoken admiration. All the performers had been praised, of course—Mr. Cinqmars for his lifelike rendering of Triplet, in which personation he was declared by some enthusiastic friends to have rivalled Webster and Lemaitre; Mrs. Cinqmars for her pathos and charming appearance as Mabel Vane; Lord Pauly and the Major for their several merits; but no one attempted to disguise the fact that Elizabeth's had been the crowning triumph. Enthusiastic young men told her that she ought to go on the stage, that she would take the town by storm, and make ten thousand a year, and so on. Lord Pauly told her—but that was only a repetition of what he had told her before.

‘You promised you would never speak of that subject again,’ she said.

It was in a waltz, as they were whirling round to the *Soldaten Lieder*.

‘I shall speak of it till my dying day,’ he said. ‘Yes, if it makes you ever so angry. Remember what I told you. I swore an oath the day I saw you first.’

‘I will never dance with you again.’

‘O, yes, you will. But I tell you what you will never do : you will never marry that parson fellow. It isn’t possible that, after having seen what the world is, and your own capacity for shining in it, you could lead such a life as you’d have to lead with him.’

‘Ah, that’s because you don’t know how much I love him,’ the girl answered, with a radiant look. ‘I’d rather be shut up in a convent, like Heloise, and exist upon an occasional letter from him, than have all the pleasures of the world without him.’

‘Bosh !’ said the Viscount bluntly. ‘A week of the convent would make you tell another story. Your fancy for this man is one of your caprices : and Heaven knows you are about the most capricious woman in the world. You like him because every one is opposed to your marrying him—because it’s about the maddest, most suicidal thing you could do.’

‘I’m tired,’ said Elizabeth ; ‘take me to a seat, please.’

And having once released herself from him, she took care that Lord Paulyn should have no farther speech with her that night.

She thought of his impertinences this morning, as she lay on the sofa listlessly fanning herself ; thought of his obstinate pursuit of her ; and thought—with

some touch of pride in her own superiority to sordid considerations—how very few young women in her position would have held out against such a siege.

She was in the midst of a half-stifled yawn when the pompous butler opened the door in his grand sweeping way, and announced, 'Mr. Forde.'

She sprang to her feet, her heart beating violently, her tired eyes brightening with sudden joy, and seemed as if, forgetful of the scarcely departed butler, she would have flung herself into her lover's arms.

Her lover! Alas, was that a lover whose grave eyes met hers with so cold a gaze? She drew back, appalled by that strange look.

'Malcolm!' she cried, 'what is the matter?'

'There is so much the matter, Miss Luttrell, that I have hesitated this morning as to whether I should write you a brief note of farewell, or come here to bid you my last good-bye in person.'

The girl drew herself up with her queenliest air. Trembling with a strange inward shiver, sick at heart, cold as death, she yet faced him resolutely; ready to see the ship that carried all her freight of hope and gladness go down to the bottom of the ocean without one cry of despair.

'It was at least polite to call,' she said loftily.

‘May I ask what has caused this abrupt change in your plans?’

‘I think it is scarcely needful for you to inquire. But I have no wish to be otherwise than outspoken. I was at your friend’s house last night, and saw you.’

‘I hope you were not very much shocked by what you saw.’

Not for worlds would she now have apologised for her conduct, or explained that she had intended to tell him all about the amateur performance at the Rancho when it was over.

‘I might have forgiven what I saw; though, if you had known my mind in the least, you must have known how unwelcome such an exhibition would be to me.’

‘Did I play my part so very badly, then?’ she asked, with a little offended laugh, womanly vanity asserting itself even in the midst of her anguish. ‘Did I make so great a fool of myself?’

He took no notice of the inquiry, but went on, with suppressed passion, standing before her, his broad muscular hand grasping the back of one of Mrs. Chevenix’s fragile chairs, which trembled under the pressure.

‘I heard your attractions, your opportunities, your future, discussed very freely between the acts of your

comedy. I heard of your engagement to Lord Paulyn.'

'My engagement to Lord Paulyn!' she cried, staring at him with widening eyes.

'Yes; a fact which I found confirmed this morning by one of the newspapers in the coffee-room where I breakfasted.'

He gave her a copy of the *Court Journal*.

'You will see your name there among the announcements of impending marriages in high life. "A marriage is on the *tapis* between Lord Paulyn and Miss Luttrell, daughter of the Rev. Wilmot Luttrell, vicar of Hawleigh." It was rather hard that you should allow the court newsman to be wiser than I.'

Eager words of denial trembled on her lips, but before they could be spoken, pride silenced her. What! he came to her in this ruthless fashion, came with his course resolved, and resigned her as coolly as if she were a prize not worth contesting.

'You have come here to—to give me up,' she said.

'I have resigned myself to circumstances. But would it not have been as well to be off with the old love before you were on with the new? It is a matter of little consequence, perhaps, to the new love; but it is not quite fair to the old.'

‘You have not taken the trouble to think that this paragraph might be a newsmonger’s unlicensed gossip, as meaningless as the talk you may have heard last night.’

He looked at her earnestly. No, there was neither penitence nor love in that cold beautiful face, only pride and anger. Was it the same face that had looked at him passionately in the moonlight four months ago? Was this the woman who had almost offered him her love?

‘Even if this announcement is somewhat premature, I have learned enough to know that it is only premature, that it must come in due course, unless, indeed, you are more reckless of your reputation than I could have supposed it possible for your father’s daughter to be. Your name has been too long associated with Lord Paulyne’s to admit of any termination but one to your acquaintance. For your own sake, I recommend you to marry him.’

‘I am hardly likely to despise such generous advice. If you had ever loved me,’ with a sudden burst of passion, ‘you could not talk to me like this.’

‘I have loved you well enough to falsify the whole scheme of my life, to sacrifice the dearest wish of my mind—’

‘But it was such an unwilling sacrifice,’ ex-

claimed Elizabeth bitterly. ‘God forbid that I should profit by it!’

‘God only knows how much I have loved you, Elizabeth; for He alone knows the strength of my temptation and the weakness of my soul. But you—you were only playing at love; and the romantic ardour which you assumed, with so fatal a charm, was so factitious a sentiment that it could not weigh for a single hour against your love of pleasure, or stand between your ambition and its object for a single day. Let it pass, with that dead past to which it belongs. The dream was sweet enough while it lasted; but it was only a dream, and it has gone “like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors.”’

She stood like a statue, hardening her heart against him. What, when all the world—the world as represented by Lord Pauly and society at the Rancho—was at her feet, did he cast her off so lightly, without allowing her any fair opportunity of justifying herself? For it was hardly to be supposed that she would kiss the dust beneath his feet, as it were, confessing her sins, and supplicating his pardon.

What had she done? Only enjoyed her life for this one brief summer-time, holding his image in her heart of hearts all the while. Yes, in the very whirl-

pool of pleasure looking upward at him, as at a star seen from the depths of a storm-darkened sea. And she had refused Park-lane, Cowes, Ashcombe, and two more country-seats for his sake.

Should she tell him of her rejection of Lord Paulyn — tell him that one incontrovertible fact which must reinstate her at once and for ever in his esteem ? What, tell him this when he spoke of his love as a thing of the past, a dream that he had dreamed and done with, a snare which he had happily escaped, regaining his liberty of election, his freedom for that grander life in which human love had no part ? What, sue again for his love, lay bare her passionate heart, again overstep the boundary line of womanly modesty, remind him how she had been the first to love, almost the first to declare her love ? Had he not this moment reminded her, inferentially, of that most humiliating fact ?

Thus argued pride, and sealed her lips. Hope spoke still louder : Let him talk as he might, he loved her, and could no more live without her than she could exist, a reasonable creature, without him. Let him leave her ; let him renounce her. He would come back again, would be at her feet pleading for forgiveness, himself the acknowledged sinner, his the humiliation.

In that brief happy courtship, in those twilit rambles on the outskirts of Hawleigh, when for one delicious hour in the day they had been all the world to each other, Malcolm had laid his heart bare before her, had confessed all the anguish that his efforts not to adore her had cost him.

‘I have heard of men making as strong a stand against infidelity,’ he said; ‘but I doubt if any man ever before fought so hard a fight against a sinless love.’

‘I must be very horrid,’ the girl answered in her frivolous way, ‘or you would scarcely have taken so much trouble to shut the door of your heart against me.’

‘You are all that is lovely and adorable,’ he said; ‘but I had made up my mind to be a Francis Xavier on a small scale, and you came between me and my cherished dreams.’

She remembered these things to-day, as she stood, with locked lips and cold scornful eyes, confronting him, resolved that from him alone should come the first attempt at reconciliation.

‘Having renounced me,’ she said at last, after a pause, in which he had waited, Heaven knows with what passionate eagerness, for any denial or supplication from her, ‘in so deliberate and decisive a

manner, I conclude you have nothing more to say—except indeed, to tell me to what address I shall send your letters and presents.'

This home-thrust she fancied must needs bring him to his senses.

'Destroy them all!' he cried savagely. 'They are the memorials of a most miserable infatuation.'

'As you please,' she answered coolly, preserving that outward semblance of an unshaken spirit to the last, acting her part of indifference and disdain far better than he played his. Had she not her experience of last night to help her? This morning's interview was no whit the less a scenic display—an actress's representation of supreme calm, with the strong tide of a woman's passion swelling and beating in her stormy breast all the while.

'Then there is nothing more,' he said quietly, but with the quietness of suppressed passion, and with no attempt to conceal his emotion, only trying to carry himself manfully in spite thereof, 'except for us to say good-bye. Let it be a friendly farewell, Elizabeth, for it is likely to be a long one.'

She looked at him curiously. That was hardly the tone of a man who meant to retrace his steps—to leave her in anger to-day, only to come back to her repentant to-morrow. No, there was no room to

doubt his earnestness. He did mean this farewell to be irrevocable—this parting for ever and ever. It was only when he had turned his back upon her—when the door was shut between them—that he would discover how impossible it was for them to live apart.

‘There must be some reciprocity in these things,’ she thought; ‘he could not be so much to me—a part of my very life—and I nothing to him. He must come back to me.’

He held out his hand, and she gave him hers, and suffered it to remain helpless, unresisting, in his strong grasp, while he spoke to her.

‘Elizabeth,’ he said, ‘there are some things very hard to forgive. It is hard for me to forgive you the delusive joys of the last few months—the deep delight I felt that March night when for the first time in my life passionate love had full mastery over my heart, and all the world seemed to begin and end in you. It is bitter to look back upon that hour to-day, and know that I was the veriest slave of a delusion—the blindest fool of a woman’s idle fancy. But I did not come here to reproach you. The dream is past. You might have spared me the sharpness of this sudden waking; but even that I will try to forgive you. Good-bye.’

He looked at her with a sad strange smile, the firm lips set in their old resolute curve, but with an unwonted tenderness in the earnest eyes.

‘Good-bye,’ he repeated; ‘let me kiss you once more at parting, even if I kiss Lord Paulyn’s plighted wife.’

He took her in his arms, she coldly submissive, with an almost apathetic air. Was it not time for her to speak, to justify herself, to declare that there was no stranger in all that wide city farther from her heart than Reginald Paulyn? No, answered pride; it would be time enough to enlighten him when he came back to her to-morrow and sued for pardon. She would not defend herself—she would not stoop to be forgiven. Had she not humiliated herself too much already for his sake, when she gave him the love he had never asked?

‘This time I will hold my own against him,’ she thought; ‘I will not be for ever humbling myself in the very dust at his feet. From the beginning I have loved him with too slavish a love.’

He touched her forehead with his lips—the passionless kiss of forgiveness for a great wrong. It was the ruin of his air-built castle of earthly hope for which he pardoned her in that last kiss. Before him, wide and far-reaching as the summer

sea that he had looked upon a few days ago from a grassy peak among the Pentlands, stretched a nobler prospect, a grander future than her love could ever have helped him to win, and hopes that were not earth-bound. Surely he was resigning very little in this surrender of the one woman he had loved with a love beyond control. And yet the parting tore his heart-strings as they had never been strained before—not even when he stood by the death-bed of Alice Fraser.

‘I am not destined to be fortunate in my loves,’ he said bitterly, the memory of that older anguish mingling curiously with his pain to-day; ‘let me try to hope that I have a better destiny than mere earthly happiness.’

The qualifying adjective jarred a little upon her ear. He had always set her so low; he had always loved her grudgingly, with a reservation of his better self, giving her only half his heart at best.

‘You have been a great deal too good for me,’ she said, with exceeding bitterness, ‘and you have taken care that I should feel your superiority. It is not given to every woman to be like your first love—“simply perfect;” and I have some reason to be grateful to those worldly-minded people who are willing to accept me for what I am.’

‘Lord Paulyn, for instance,’ said Mr. Forde, becoming very worldly-minded in a moment, his eyes lighting up angrily—‘Lord Paulyn, who has made his adoration of you a fact notorious to all the world.’

‘It is something to have one constant admirer. Lord Paulyn is at least not ashamed of admiring me. He does not fight against the sentiment, as a weakness unworthy of his manhood. He does not feel himself degraded by his attachment.’

This sounded like a direct avowal of the Viscount’s affection, and of her acceptance thereof; surely no woman would speak in this manner except of an accepted lover. If Malcolm Forde had fondly hoped for denial—for a tardy attempt at justification—this unqualified admission was sufficient to enlighten him.

‘I did not come here to bandy words, Miss Luttrell,’ he said, drawing himself up stiffly; ‘but I will not leave you without repeating a warning I gave you once before. If you set any value upon your peace on earth, or your fitness for heaven, since a woman is in some measure the slave of her surroundings, do not marry Lord Paulyn. I am not apt to go in the way of scandal, but I have heard enough of his career to justify me in declaring that

union with him would be the quickest road that you could take to life-long misery.'

' Yet you advised me just now to marry him. Rather inconsistent, is it not ?'

' Anger is always inconsistent. It was passion that spoke then, it is reason that pleads now. Do not let foolish friends persuade you to your ruin, Miss Luttrell. Your beauty may win as good a position as Lord Paulyn can give you from a much better man, if you are patient, and wait a little while for that brilliant establishment which you have no doubt been taught to consider the summit of earthly felicity.'

' Your advice is as insulting as—as every word you have said this morning,' cried Elizabeth, in a burst of passion.

' Forgive me,' he said, with extreme gentleness. ' I did wrong to speak bitterly. It is not your fault if you have been schooled by worldly teachers. Believe me, it was of your own welfare, your future on this earth and in the world beyond, I was thinking. O Elizabeth, I know that it is in your power to become a good woman ; that it is in your nature to be pure and noble. It is only your surroundings that are false. Let my last memory of you be one of peace and friendship, and let your memory of me be

of one who once dearly loved you, and to the last had your happiness at heart.'

His softened tone set her heart beating with a new hope. That phrase, 'once loved you,' froze it again, and held her silent as death. A dull blank shadow crept over her face; she stood looking at the ground, only just able to stand. When she looked up, with a blinding mist before her eyes, he was gone. And dimly perceiving the empty space which he had filled, and feeling in a moment that he had vanished out of her life for ever, the numbness of despair came over her, and she fell senseless across the spot where he had stood.

CHAPTER VII.

‘ The good explore,

For peace, those realms where guilt can never soar;
The proud, the wayward, who have fix'd below
Their joy, and find this earth enough for woe,
Lose in that one their all—perchance a mite—
But who in patience parts with all delight?’

MRS. CHEVENIX, descending to her drawing-room in state,—after the restorative effects of a leisurely breakfast in bed, and a gradual and easy toilet; her dress prepared for the reception of morning callers; her complexion refreshed with violet powder,—was horrified at finding her niece prostrate on the threshold of the back drawing-room. But when Mrs. Chevenix and her maid had administered the usual remedies, with a good deal of rushing to and fro, and the girl’s haggard eyes reopened on the outer world, her first care was to assure them that the fainting fit was of no importance. She had been a little over-fatigued last night, that was all.

‘ I can’t imagine what made you get up so preposterously early this morning, child,’ said Mrs. Cheve-

nix rather impatiently, 'instead of trying to recruit your strength, as any sensible young woman would have done. How can you expect your complexion to last, if you go on in this way? You are as dark under the eyes as if you had not slept an hour for the last fortnight. Good looks are very well in their way, Elizabeth; but they won't stand such treatment as this. Go up to your room and lie down for an hour or two, and let Mason give you one of my globules.'

Elizabeth shrugged her shoulders impatiently: globules for the cure of her disease! Infinitesimal doses for the healing of that great agony! How foolish a thing this second childishness of comfortable emotionless middle age is; this fools' paradise of pet poodles and homœopathy; this empty senile existence, which remains for some men and women, when feeling and passion are dead and gone!

'You know I don't believe in homœopathic medicines,' she said, turning her tired head aside upon the pillow of the sofa where they had laid her, with a look of utter weariness and disgust; 'or in any other medicines, indeed. I was never ill in my life, that I can remember, and I am not ill now. Let me lie here; I feel as if I could never get up again as long as I live.'

'A natural consequence of over-excitement,' said

Mrs. Chevenix. ‘ Shut the folding-doors, Mason, in case any one should call ; and bring Miss Luttrell the *couver-pied* from the sofa in my bedroom. You shall have a mutton-chop and a pint of Moselle for your luncheon, Lizzie ; and if Lord Paulyn should come before luncheon, I sha’n’t allow him to see you.’

‘ Lord Paulyn !’ cried the girl, with a shiver ; ‘ let me never hear his name again as long as I live. He has broken my heart.’

Mrs. Chevenix received this wild assertion with the stony stare of bewilderment.

‘ My dearest Lizzie, what are you dreaming of ?’ she exclaimed ; pleased to think that Mason had departed, in quest of the *couver-pied*, before this strange utterance. ‘ I am sure that poor young man is perfectly devoted to you.’

‘ Who wants his devotion ?’ cried Elizabeth impatiently. ‘ Has he ever been anything but a torment to me ? O, yes, I know what you are going to say,’ she exclaimed, interrupting aunt Chevenix’s half-uttered exclamation. ‘ In that case, why did I encourage his attentions ? If I did so, I hardly knew that I was encouraging them. It was rather pleasant to feel that other people thought a great deal more of me on account of his silly infatuation ; and he is not the kind of man who would ever be much the worse

for any disappointment in that way. It would be too preposterous to suppose that he has a heart capable of feeling deeply about anything except his race-horses.'

This was said half listlessly, yet with an air which implied that the speaker was trying to justify herself, and was half doubtful of the force of her own reasoning.

'No heart!' ejaculated Mrs. Chevenix indignantly; 'why, I do believe that young man is all heart. I'm sure the warmth of his attachment to you is a very strong proof of it. No heart, indeed. If you had spoken of your tall curate now, with his rigid puritanical expression of countenance (just the look of an icono—what's his name—a man who would chop the noses off the saints on the carved doors of a cathedral—I should think), if you had talked of his having no heart, I might have agreed with you.'

'Aunt Chevenix,' said Elizabeth, starting up from her pillow, 'if you ever dare to say one word in disparagement of Malcolm Forde, I shall hate you. I am almost tempted to hate you as it is, for being at the root of all my misery. Don't put your finger upon an open wound. You have no occasion to run him down now; he is nothing more to me. He came here this morning, not an hour ago, to give me up. I meant to tell you nothing about this; but you would have

found it out somehow, I daresay, before long, and it is just as well you should know at once. He came to give me up, of his own accord. Our dream of happiness was very short, was it not ? and he has ended it of his own free will. It would hardly have seemed so strange if I had been tempted away from him ; for, so far as the offer of a brilliant position in this world can tempt a penniless parson's daughter, I have been tempted. Yet Heaven knows my faith never wavered for a moment. But he had heard something about Lord Pauly and me ; had seen some silly paragraph in a newspaper, and came to give me up. Even if I had been inclined to exculpate myself, he gave me no opportunity ; he would hardly let me speak. And it was not for me to supplicate for a hearing ; so I let him go, without an effort to detain him, almost as coldly as he renounced me.'

' And you acted like a woman of spirit in so doing,' cried Mrs. Chevenix triumphantly ; indeed, nothing could be more delightful to her than this intelligence. ' Sue to him, indeed—exculpate yourself to him !—that would be rather too much. I congratulate you, my dear girl, upon having released yourself from a most unfortunate and mistaken engagement.'

' It may have been all that,' said the girl, shrinking from her aunt's soothing caress with a shiver ;

‘but, unluckily, I loved the man. “I loved you once,”’ she repeated dreamily, going back to her interview with Malcom Forde. ‘O God, that I should live to hear him say that ! “I loved you once.”’

‘My dearest child, it was not in human nature that such an engagement as that could endure. You, handsome, accomplished, admired, with peculiar opportunities of social success ;’ this with a swelling pride in that dainty little establishment in Eaton-place-south, and in herself as the sole source of these opportunities. ‘He, an obscure provincial curate ; a man who, entering the Church somewhat late in life, has actually started at a disadvantage ; not even a particularly agreeable or good-looking person ; and I feel sure that when reason and experience have come to your aid, Lizzie, you will confess the baselessness of your infatuation.’

‘When experience has made me a hard, worldly old woman, like Lady Paulyn, I may begin to see things in that light,’ said Elizabeth bitterly ; ‘but please don’t talk to me any more about Mr. Forde. Respect his name as you would if he were dead. As if he were dead,’ she repeated. ‘Could I be any more unhappy if he were lying in his grave ?’

‘Do not be afraid that I shall talk of the man,’ exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix indignantly. ‘I am too

much disgusted with his conduct. To choose the very time in which his prospects began to improve—as I conclude this uncle has left him something—to throw you off! However, I thank Providence that your future may be fifty times more brilliant than any position which *he* could offer you at his best!

Elizabeth said nothing; but sat with fixed eyes, staring at empty space. Could it be that he was indeed dead to her; that he would not come back? O, surely not. That parting could not be final. It was not possible that he could pluck her from his heart so easily; she, who on her side felt as if she were verily a part of himself, a mere subordinate being that could have no existence without him. She felt all this in spite of her season of independent pleasure; in spite of these last few months in which he had had no share in her life. Her lower instincts had been gratified by those vanities and dissipations; the nobler half of her being belonged to him, and held itself apart from all the world besides.

‘He will come back to me,’ she said to herself. ‘If I had not thought that, I could never have let him go. I should have grovelled at his feet, thrown myself between him and the door, clung to him as a ship-wrecked sailor clings to a floating spar, rather than let me for ever.’

Buoyed up by this belief, Elizabeth supported her existence with a tolerable show of calm; was even able to go to a dinner-party that evening—a dinner in Montague-square—at which there was no fear of meeting Lord Paulyn; looked very lovely, in spite of her pallor, if not her best; sang, and talked, and laughed, with that low melodious laugh which was one of her fascinations; and altogether delighted Mrs. Chevenix, who had expected to see her niece stricken down utterly for a day or two.

‘He will come back to me,’ the girl was saying to herself all the evening. ‘There will be a letter, perhaps, waiting for me when we go home.’

All that day she had been expecting his return, or at the least some tender remorseful letter; but the day had passed and he had made no sign. Then she told herself that his anger could hardly cool all at once; he had been very angry, no doubt, though he had borne himself like a rock. Not all at once could he discover how essential she was to his life.

How eager she was for the return to Eaton-place! how more than usually wearisome seemed that endless small talk about flower shows and picture galleries, and opera singers and classical music! She fancied how the letter would be handed to her by her aunt’s serving-man; the dear letter with its super-

scription in that noble hand. How she would snatch it from the salver, and run up to her own room to devour its contents in happy solitude! She could almost fancy how it would begin:

‘My dearest,—Forgive me!’

They were at home at last; but the serving-man, who looked sleepy, brought her no salver.

‘Any letters, Plomber?’ she asked, with well-assumed carelessness.

‘No, ma’am.’

‘Did you expect anything particular?’ Mrs. Chevenix inquired.

‘No; only I thought there might have been one from—from Gerty or Di.’

‘What can people at Hawleigh have to write about?’ said her aunt contemptuously.

The girl went straight to her room, heart-sick.

‘He will come back to me to-morrow,’ she said.

To-morrow came, but brought no tidings of Malcolm Forde—a dreary day, the longest Elizabeth ever remembered in her life—which had contained many days that were dull enough and blank enough in all conscience.

Lord Paulyn came, as he had come on the afternoon; but he was not allowed to see Miss

Luttrell. She was ill, Mrs. Chevenix told him, really prostrate ; ' such a sensitive nature, dear Lord Paulyne, so much imagination. The excitement of that play was too much for her. I'm afraid I must take her down to Brighton for change of air.'

The Viscount departed unwillingly, displeased at this interruption of his smaller pleasures, the trifling talk and tea-drinking, in the hour he had been wont of old to devote to more masculine diversions —horsey talk at a horsey club, or a lounge at Tattersall's.

But although he was thus banished by the diplomatic matron, Elizabeth was not really ill. She was only white and wan, with blank tearless eyes, the living image of despair. Not in a condition to be seen by a young nobleman who aspired to decorate her brow with a coronet. A lifeless creature, whose tenure of happiness hung on a thread. Would he come or write ? Would he forgive her, and take her back to his heart ?

' Why did I ever come to London ? ' she asked herself, with a curious wonder at her own folly.

The cup of pleasure, being drained to the dregs, had left an after flavour of exceeding bitterness. She looked back to those sweet peaceful days at Hawleigh, to that spring-time of life and love, when her

heart had been exultant with a girl's triumph in her first important conquest, and remembered how averse Malcolm Forde had been to the idea of this visit. And for such empty trifles, for the vapid pleasures of a London season, a few balls, a few picnics—at best only the old Hawleigh dances and picnics upon a larger scale—she had jeopardised that dearest treasure; for so childish a vanity as seeing this unknown world of good society, she had imperilled and lost the confidence of her lover!

Other to-morrows came and faded, and still there was no sign of relenting on the part of Malcolm Forde. And still the girl's white face and absent manner forbade the admission of visitors. Lord Paulyn was impatient, sullen even, with a sense of injury, as if he had been an accepted lover unduly kept at bay. Upon one particular afternoon, feeling his disappointment acutely—he had brought a fresh bouquet of stephanotis and maiden-hair every afternoon, waxen blossoms which had bloomed and languished unheeded by Elizabeth's dull eyes—he gave free utterance to his vexation, and in a communicative mood poured his griefs into the maternal bosom of Mrs. Chevenix. It was uncommonly hard, he said, that after all he had put up with and gone through—the amount of nonsense he had stood from

Miss Luttrell—she should throw him over the bridge for a parson fellow like that man at Hawleigh.

‘My dear Lord Panlyn,’ replied Mrs. Chevenix, with a confidential air, bending her head a little nearer to the young man, as he sat *à cheval* on his favourite *pouff*, and by that gracious movement besprinkling him lightly with *poudre de Maréchale*, ‘that engagement is one which I have a secret conviction cannot be enduring. If I had not entertained such an opinion, I should never have encouraged—I will go farther, and say I would never have sanctioned—your frequent presence in this house. No,’ this with a lofty air, as of sublimest virtue, ‘I have too much regard for what is due to myself, as well as to you. I am no slave of rank or wealth. If I did not think that you were eminently suited to my niece, and Mr. Forde as eminently unsuited to her, I should not have lent my support to an intimacy which could have but one result. Elizabeth is a girl whom to know is to love.’

‘I’m not sure about that,’ said the young man, not deeply moved by this solemn address. ‘She’s rather a queer girl, take her altogether; fools a man to the top of his bent one day, and snubs him the next; gives herself no end of airs, as if the world and everybody in it had been made to order for her.

But she's the handsomest woman in London, and she has a peculiar way of her own that no man can stand against. I hadn't known her a fortnight before I made up my mind I'd marry her. But I didn't go to work rashly for all that; I left Hawleigh without committing myself; gave myself time to find out if it was a serious case with me.'

Mrs. Chevenix gave a little impatient sigh.

'If you had been a shade less cautious, and had spoken out at once, you might have prevented this foolish affair with Mr. Forde,' she said.

'Yes, but I pride myself upon knowing what I'm about—not putting my horse at a fence unless I know what's on the other side of it. And the worst of this Forde business is, that she's desperately fond of him, has owned as much to me, and gloried in owning it.'

'A girl's delusion,' said Mrs. Chevenix soothingly; 'the romance of an hour, which will vanish like a summer cloud when the charm of novelty is gone. She has some foolish exalted idea of Mr. Forde's character, a half-religious hallucination that is not likely to last very long.'

'I hope not,' replied the Viscount in his matter-of-fact way. 'At any rate, I mean to stand my ground; only it's rather wearing for a man's temper.

I wanted the whole business settled and done with by the end of this season. I've all manner of engagements for my yachts and stable. I must be at Goodwood at the end of this month, and I've a sailing-match at Havre the first week in August; then come German steeplechases. I've wasted more time than I ever wasted in my life before upon this affair.'

'Be assured of my entire sympathy,' murmured Mrs. Chevenix.

'O, yes, of course, I know you are all there,' answered the hapless lover carelessly. 'I've known all along you'd be on my side. It isn't likely you'd back that plater,' by which contemptuous epithet he described his rival. 'But I should like to see the wind-up of this engagement, or,' almost savagely, 'I should like to get Elizabeth Luttrell out of my head, and be my own man again.'

Mrs. Chevenix shuddered. This hint of a sudden wrench, a violent effort to emancipate himself, on the part of the Viscount, filled her soul with consternation.

'I'm doing very wrong,' she exclaimed, with a sudden gush of friendship. 'It is a breach of confidence for which I shall hardly be able to forgive myself, but I can't bear to see you suffer and to withhold knowledge that might be consolatory. I

have reason to believe that the engagement between my niece and Mr. Forde is at an end.'

'What!' cried Reginald Pauly; 'she has thrown him off. She has served him as she serves everybody else, blown hot one day and cold the next.'

'I have reason to believe that they have quarrelled,' Mrs. Chevenix said mysteriously.

'What, has she seen him lately?'

'She has; and since I have gone so far,—on the impulse of the moment, prompted only by my sympathy with your depth of feeling,—I must still go farther. The quarrel was about you. Mr. Forde had seen some paragraph associating your names—a marriage in high life—something absurd of that kind.'

'Yes, I know; Cinqmars showed me the newspaper. It was his doing, I fancy. Mrs. Cinqmars has taken me under her wing, and no doubt inspired the paragraph, with the notion that it might bring matters to a crisis.'

'It has produced a crisis,' said Mrs. Chevenix solemnly, 'and a very painful one for Elizabeth. The poor girl is utterly crushed.'

'She was so fond of that beggar,' muttered Lord Pauly gloomily.

'Perhaps not so much on that account as for the

humiliation involved in such an idea. To be accused of having played fast and loose, of having encouraged your attentions while she was engaged to him. And now, between you both, she finds herself abandoned, standing alone in the world, perhaps the mark for slander.'

'Abandoned! standing alone!' cried Lord Paulyn, starting up from his low chair as if he would have rushed off at once in quest of a marriage license. 'Why, she must know that I am ready to marry her to-morrow!'

This was just the point at which Mrs. Chevenix could afford to leave him.

'My dear young friend,' she exclaimed, 'moderate your feelings, I entreat. She is not a girl to be taken by storm. Let her recover from the shock she has received; then, while her heart is still sore, wounded, weary with a sense of its own emptiness, then urge your suit once more, and I have little doubt that you will conquer; that the contrast between your generous all-confiding affection and Mr. Forde's jealous tyranny will awaken the purest and truest emotions of her heart.'

This was a more exalted style of language than Reginald Paulyn cared about—a kind of thing which, in his own simple and forcible vocabulary, he de-

nominated 'humbug'—but the main fact was pleasing to him. Elizabeth had dismissed, or had been deserted by, her plighted lover. The ground was cleared for himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘ She weeps alone for pleasures not to be ;
Sorely she wept until the night came on,
And then, instead of love, O misery !
She brooded o'er the luxury alone :
His image in the dusk she seem'd to see,
And to the silence made a gentle moan,
Spreading her perfect arms upon the air,
And on her couch low murmuring, “ Where ? O
where ? ” ’

No flicker of colour brightened the pallid cheeks, no ray of their accustomed light shone in the dull eyes, and yet Elizabeth was not ill. She was only intensely miserable.

‘ I only wish I were ill,’ she said impatiently, when her aunt urged the necessity of medical advice, change of air—some speedy means by which blanched cheeks and heavy eyes might be cured. ‘ For in that case there might be some hope that I should die. But I am not ill; I don’t believe my pulse beats half-a-dozen times more in a minute since Malcolm Forde renounced me. I eat and drink, and sleep even, more or less. There are a good many

hours in every night in which I lie awake staring at the wall; but before the maid comes to get my bath ready, I do manage to sleep, somehow. And I dream that Malcolm and I are happy, walking on the common just beyond our house at Hawleigh. I never dream of our quarrel; only that I am with him, and utterly happy. I think the pain of waking from one of those lying dreams, and finding that it is only a dream, is sharper agony than the worst vision of his unkindness with which sleep could torture me. To dream that he is all my own, to feel his hand locked in mine, and to wake and remember that I have lost him—yes, that *is* misery.'

Whereupon Mrs. Chevenix would dilate upon the childishness of such regrets, and would set forth the numerous deprivations which her niece would have had to endure as Mr. Forde's wife; how she could never have kept her carriage, or at best only a pony-chaise or one-horse wagonette, the hollowest mockery or phantasm of a carriage, infinitely worse than none, as implying the desire for an equipage without the ability to maintain one—a thing that would be spoken of timorously as a 'conveyance;' how, as a clergyman's wife, she could not hope to be on a level with the county families; how all her natural aspirations for 'style' and 'society' would be nipped in the bud;

while such means as her husband could command would be devoted to the relief of tiresome old women, and the maintenance of an expensive choir. From this dreary picture Mrs. Chevenix branched off to Lord Paulyn, his generosity, his self-abnegation, his chivalry, his thousand virtues, and his three country seats.

‘If I could be talked into marrying a man I don’t care a straw about, while I love another with all my heart and soul, your eloquence might ultimately unite me to Lord Paulyn,’ Elizabeth said, with a sneer; ‘but I am not quite weak enough for that. I daresay it sounds very ungrateful, after all the money you have spent upon me and all the trouble you have taken about me; but O, aunt Chevenix, how I wish I had never come to London! The beginning of my visit to you was the beginning of my quarrel with Malcolm. How could I slight a wish of his! I loved him hopelessly for a long year before I won him, and I only kept his love a few short weeks. Was there ever such folly since the world began?’

Mrs. Chevenix urged Brighton as the universal healer of cockney griefs. What Londoner does not believe in the curative powers of Brighton for all

ailments of the mind and body? The pleasant treadmill tramp up and down the King's-road, interchanging affectionate greetings with people you met yesterday in Bond-street; the agreeable monotony of the pier; the pervading flavour of London which mingles with the salt breath of the sea. Mrs. Chevenix declared that in that cheerful atmosphere Elizabeth would forget her griefs.

'It is not the season for Brighton, I admit,' she confessed reluctantly, 'but there are always plenty of nice people there in the Goodwood week; or we might even stay at Chichester, if you preferred it.'

'You are very good to trouble yourself so much about me,' said Elizabeth, trying to be grateful, yet with an air of extreme weariness; 'but I assure you there is nothing the matter—nothing but a sorrow that must wear itself out somehow—as all sorrows do, I suppose, when people are young and strong as I am, and not of the stuff that grief can destroy. The best place for me is home. I shall not give any one trouble there. I can just live my own life; visit the poor, perhaps, a little again,' with a faint choking sob; 'or teach in the Sunday school; and no one will take any notice of me. I am not at all fit for society. I don't hear what people are saying, and I am always in danger of answering at random; and I

don't want people to talk about the worm in the bud, or to sit like Patience on a monument, and all that kind of thing. Let me take my sorrow home to Hawleigh, auntie, and dig a decent grave for it there.'

'Go back to Hawleigh! Yes; to meet that man again, I suppose, and begin over again.'

'No fear of that. I had a letter from Gertrude this morning; I'll read you what she says about him, if you like.'

She took out a closely-written letter; that wondrous composition, a lady's letter, utterly devoid of intelligence likely to interest the human mind, yet crossed and bracketed and interpolated, as if brimming over with matter.

'We have all been surprised by Mr. Forde's sudden desertion of Hawleigh, and can only imagine that things are ended between you and him; and that you have returned to your old idea about Lord Pauly. I know auntie had set her heart upon that match, and I never thought your engagement to Mr. Forde would survive your visit to Eaton-place.'

'Other people could see my peril,' said Elizabeth bitterly, as she folded the letter. 'It was only I who was blind.'

'Other people are blessed with common sense, and would naturally foresee the termination of so

ill-advised an engagement,' Mrs. Chevenix replied sharply. She was fast losing patience with this favourite niece of hers, who had fortune at her feet, and spurned it. 'The day will come when you will repent this folly,' she said, 'at a time when it may be too late to retrace your steps. Even Lord Pauly's infatuation will not last for ever; you have trifled with him too long already.'

'Trifled with him!' echoed Elizabeth scornfully; 'I have only one wish about him,—that I may never see his face again.'

Mrs. Cinqmars called in Eaton-place a day or two after the private theatricals, and was full of anxiety about her sweet Elizabeth; entreating to be allowed to see her, if only for a few minutes. But this privilege Miss Luttrell refused obstinately.

'I detest the whole set, and will never see any of them again,' she said fretfully, when her aunt brought her that lady's message. Nor did Mrs. Chevenix press the point; she did not care to expose her niece's faded countenance to the sharp eyes of Mrs. Cinqmars. She did not want the Rancho world to know that Elizabeth had been deserted by her lover, and had taken that desertion so deeply to heart.

After about a week of anxiety, during which she had hoped every day to see the girl's dull face brighten, and her spirits revive with the natural elasticity of youth, Mrs. Chevenix lost heart; and hearing of some particular friends who were just going to Torquay, she consented to Elizabeth's return under their wing. They would take her to Exeter, where her father could meet her on the arrival of the down train; so that the proprieties should be in no manner outraged by her journey. The girl seemed so utterly broken down, that it was hopeless to expect her speedy revival. All Mrs. Chevenix's ambitious dreams must be held in suspense till next year; unless destiny interposed in some beneficent manner during the hunting season, when Lord Paulyn might reappear at the Vicarage, and find this wretched girl cured of her folly.

So Elizabeth had her wish, and went home; went home to bury her misery in the dull quiet of the old life, glad to be released from that brighter world which had now become odious to her. It is possible that some lurking hope, some expectation she would scarcely confess to herself, was at the root of her eager desire for that homeward journey.

She went over that brief sentence in Gertrude's letter again and again: 'they had been surprised by

Mr. Forde's sudden desertion of Hawleigh.' What did that mean? Had he returned to his duties and announced the approaching termination of them? or was the 'desertion' of which her sister wrote an accomplished fact? Had he bidden them farewell, and departed to some new field of usefulness? Had he shifted the scene of that laborious career which Mother Church reserves for her children?

'I shall be enlightened to-night,' she said to herself, as she bade her aunt good-bye at Paddington, in the brilliant summer noon-tide. The departure platform was crowded with holiday travellers, people who appeared to be serene in a fixed belief that this life was intended for the pursuit of frivolous pleasures.

She sat in the corner of the railway-carriage, with half-closed eyes, during the greater part of the journey, pretending to be asleep, as a means of escaping the benevolent officiousness of her aunt's particular friends; but she was conscious of every feature in the landscape that flashed past the window, and the journey seemed of an almost intolerable length to her weary spirit. Her father's mild face peering in at the window, when the train entered Exeter's stately terminus, struck her with an emotion that was almost pain. She had thought of him so little during the

last few months ; had lived her own life—a life of pleasure and vanity—with so supreme a selfishness. She clung to him for a moment, as he kissed her, with a remorseful tenderness.

‘ Why, Lizzie, my dear, how ill you look ! ’ he said, startled by the settled pallor of the face, that looked at him with such a new tenderness ; ‘ Maria told me nothing in her last letter.’

‘ There was nothing to tell, papa,’ said Elizabeth ; ‘ I am not ill, only very tired.’

‘ That foolish theatrical performance, I’m afraid, my love ; or—or—’ looking at her anxiously, ‘ you may have been unhappy about something—some misunderstanding. I have seen Forde.’

They were alone together in a deserted waiting-room ; the South Devon train having whisked Mrs. Chevenix’s particular friends off to Torquay.

‘ Then you know all, papa,’ with a feeble attempt to appear supremely indifferent ; ‘ that he and I did not suit each other, and have agreed to differ, as some one says somewhere.’

‘ Something to that effect, my dear. But Forde fully exonerated you. He took all the blame upon himself.’

‘ Very generous,’ with her old scornful laugh ; ‘ but the usual thing in such cases, I believe. Are

you very angry with me for coming back to you in this forlorn condition?"

'Angry with you, my love! How can you imagine such a thing! Forde is an excellent fellow, but could never have been a good match for you. I am not the kind of man to interfere with my children's wishes; but your aunt had inspired me with more ambitious ideas about you, and I confess I was disappointed.'

'Then you may be quite happy, papa; Mr. Forde and I have parted for ever.

"He turn'd him right and round about,
Upon the Irish shore;
And gae his bridle-reins a shake,
With adieu for ever more, my dear,
With adieu for ever more!"'

CHAPTER IX.

'Can we, whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,
Can we to men benighted
The lamp of life deny?
Salvation ! O salvation !
The joyful sound proclaim,
Till each remotest nation
Has learnt Messiah's name.'

IT was a dismal coming home after all the glories of that London season. There was a suppressed triumph in Gertrude's manner, which Elizabeth felt, but could hardly take objection to. Diana was indifferent, shrugged her shoulders, and observed that Mrs. Chevenix's London seasons were not astounding in their results. 'We are like Somebody and his men,' she said; 'we all ride up the hill, and then ride down again.' The beauty of the family had not endeared herself infinitely to these elder sisters. Blanche clung about her tenderly, and sighed, and mutely sympathised, not daring to speak of her sister's woes; but evidently brimming over with

compassion. The caresses and unspoken compassion were a great deal more tiresome to Elizabeth than the spiteful exultation of the elders.

‘I almost wish I had come back engaged to Lord Paulyn,’ she said to herself. ‘It would be better to marry a man one despised than to put up with this kind of thing.’

Mr. Forde’s name was evidently tabooed in the domestic circle, as a delicate attention to herself; but she had made her father tell her all he knew about her lost lover during the journey from Exeter.

‘Yes, my dear, he is going to put his old idea into execution; he is going to the South-Sea Islands as a missionary. It is a kind of craze of his, poor fellow; and upon my word, Lizzie, I think you are happily released from your engagement to a man with such a notion. Rely upon it, the old idea would have got the better of him sooner or later, however comfortably settled he might have been in England; and he would have wanted to drag you off to some savage country with him.’

‘Very likely,’ said Elizabeth, with a little sigh.

She was thinking what happiness it would have seemed to her to have gone with him; to have shared his perils, to have lightened his labours, to have been verily the other half of his mind and soul.

What matter how desolate the region so long as they two had been together; to have watched his slumbers in those long silent nights, with no sound save the distant cry of some beast of prey; to have died even, clasped to his breast, beneath a rain of poisoned arrows; or done to death by a savage's stone hatchet!

‘When does he go?’ she asked presently.

‘Immediately. He has bidden us all good-bye. He preaches his farewell sermon in St. Clement's to-morrow evening.’

Her heart gave a wild leap at this. She would hear his voice once more. He would see her sitting in her accustomed corner in the old square pew below the pulpit—could not help seeing her all through his sermon; who could tell if the sight of her face might not melt him?

‘But his heart is made of stone,’ she thought, ‘or it would have softened towards me before this. He has only a heart for the heathen; not for common human sorrows, not for the mute agonies of a love like mine.’

‘I suppose if I had any proper pride, I should not go to hear him preach to-morrow night,’ she said to herself; ‘but I think my stock of pride was exhausted the day he came to me in Eaton-place. If

that interview were to come over again, I would grovel in the dust at his feet. What is there that I would not do to win him back?"

Home hardly seemed such a peaceful shelter as she had fancied it when she turned with disgust from the frivolities of Eaton-place. It would have been very well without her sisters; but she had an uncomfortable consciousness that six watchful eyes were upon her, and that three active minds were occupied in the consideration of her affairs. She had not even the comfort of solitude in the night season, for her tower was shared by Blanche, and she could not sigh or sob in her sleep without arousing that sympathetic young person, who was unhappily a light sleeper. She heard soothing murmurs of 'poor Lizzie,' 'poor darling,' amidst her fitful slumber; and turned angrily upon her pillow, with her face to the wall, like king David in the day of his sorrow.

She looked desperately ill next morning, when the July sun shone into the tower chamber, and the skylark sent up his orisons from his wicker cage outside the arched casement. The excitement of her return, vague hopes that lightened her despair, had brightened her face with a faint semblance of the old brightness yesterday evening; but to-day Blanche

beheld the wreck that one season's joys and sorrows had made of her sister.

'I'll bring you your breakfast, darling,' she said, in her caressing way. 'Of course you won't think of going to church to-day.'

'Did you ever know me stop away from church on a Sunday morning?' Elizabeth answered impatiently; 'that is one of the penalties of our position.'

'But if you are really ill, darling.'

'I am not really ill; there is nothing the matter with me. You needn't stare at me in that disconsolate way. I can't help it if I am pale: a London season is not calculated to improve one's complexion. You can send me up a cup of tea presently, if you like; I always had an early cup of tea in London. And if you'll be kind enough to go on dressing and take no notice of me, I may be able to get half-an-hour's sleep.'

That half-hour's sleep seemed to have done a good deal for Elizabeth; for when she came downstairs, after a cold bath and a careful toilet, when the bells began to ring gaily out from the ponderous square tower of St. Clement's, she was looking something like her old self. She had put on her prettiest bonnet, and had dressed herself in white; the dress

Malcolm had always praised. If the charm of a bonnet or a dress could only touch his heart, and keep him from cocoa-nut groves, and savage women in scanty raiment, and other horrors!

What a strange thing it seemed to hear his voice once more in the gray old church!—to hear it and to know that this day was the last upon which she could ever hope to hear it; for beyond that dismal mission who would dare to look? She tried to realise the fact of his speedy departure, but it was difficult. His presence in the old familiar church was such a natural thing—a fact that had been going on all her life, it seemed to her; for she could hardly bring herself to look behind those days, to the blank era of curates who counted for nothing in her existence. And the church would be there still, a dreary immutability; the voice of a stranger echoing along the same aisle, and she compelled to sit and listen: while her miserable lonely soul tried to follow that beloved wanderer across unknown seas, to a land that was more strange than a fairy tale.

His presence there to-day, considered in the light of that near future, had a phantasmal aspect, as if the spirit of the newly-dead had been with them for a brief space, looking at them with kind and mournful eyes. Was he not like the very dead; called

away to a land distant and inaccessible as the regions of death? Was there any stronger hope of seeing him again than if he had indeed been numbered with the dead?

He, too, had changed since that day in Eaton-place. He was paler than usual, and his eyes had a haggard look, as with prolonged sleeplessness. But Elizabeth dared not appropriate to herself these signs of deep feeling. Was there not enough in his parting with these people, in the thoughts of the new life that lay before him, to move him strangely?

Not once throughout that morning service did their eyes meet. He read the prayers and lessons in his grave firm voice, with no sign of faltering, every tone strong and penetrating as of old, no fragments of sentences going astray among the echoes, every word clear, resonant as a deep-toned bell.

The interval between the two services was a dreary blank for Elizabeth. The monotonous machinery of home, which had been so wearisome before her departure, seemed still more wearisome now. She shuddered at the thought that her life was to go on for ever and ever like this; every Sunday an exact repetition of other Sundays. The mid-day luncheon, enlivened by an occasional dropper-in; the afternoon, dawdled away somehow; the evening service, in the

mournful summer dusk ; the all-pervading sense that life was an objectless business. How was she to endure these things until the end of her days ?

Evening came at last : the bells ringing with a softer sound in the balmy air. The old church was more crowded than Elizabeth ever remembered to have seen it before, crowded with people who very seldom came to church, crowded with those for whom Mr. Forde had worked with an unflagging zeal—the very poor.

Mr. Luttrell read prayers, prayers which Elizabeth heard unconscious of their meaning ; while Gertrude prayed and responded in her usual business-like way, with the air of an ancient mother assisting at the sacrifice of her son. Very long those prayers seemed to Elizabeth, but they came to an end at last, and in the deepening dusk Mr. Forde went slowly up to the pulpit.

Then, as he adjusted the newly-lighted wax candles on each side of him, needing the light very little for his own convenience, since his sermons were chiefly extempore, he looked thoughtfully downwards, and, Elizabeth looking up from her corner in the old pew, their eyes met for the first time ; his so grave and spiritual in their expression, with a far-away look, as of a man whose thoughts dwell in worlds remote

from this common earth ; hers yearning, imploring, despairing.

Brief was the moment of those looks meeting. He unrolled his little black-covered volume of notes, and began the last sermon he was ever to preach in Hawleigh.

Wanting the fire of the speaker's voice and manner, the depth of pathos in some passages, the passion of faith in others, a barren transcript of that farewell address might seem commonplace enough. The things he had to say to them were things that have been said very often before at such partings ; it was only the man who was exceptional : exceptional in his earnestness, exceptional in a certain grandeur of face and manner, which, to that regretful assembly, made him God-like. He told them simply, but with a fervour in those simple phrases, a warmth in those subdued tones, how he had laboured for them and loved them ; with what happy results, with a love that had been returned to him sevenfold, with experiences that had been unutterably sweet to him. He told them how he dared to believe that much of his labour among them would be permanent ; that it was work which, done once, was done for ever ; that the seed would remain and yield a plenteous harvest, when he the sower was far away, labouring to redeem

waste lands where no seed had ever been scattered, where no sheaves had ever been gathered for the Master's barns. Then, with a sudden change from mournful tenderness to supreme enthusiasm, he told them what he was going to do. How this mission service was the realisation of a hope and a dream that had been with him more or less from the beginning, that had swelled his heart long ago, when he was a boy at his mother's knee, hearing from her dear lips sad stories of that far-away world where the light of revelation had never cloven the thick darkness, where man lived and died without God.

Of possible dangers to be encountered he spoke not at all. He showed them only the brighter side of a missionary's career; the grandeur of his privileges as a bearer of glad tidings, the vast hopes that he carried with him as the regenerator of a people lost to their God, as the very agent and lieutenant of Christ himself. He dwelt with a picturesque fancy on the natural splendour of that remote world amidst the southern sea. He spoke of those groves where the breadfruit-tree spreads its stalwart branches wide as those of patriarchal oak or elm in pleasant England; where the leafy woods in nature's calm decay are glorious with an ever-changing splendour of hue unknown in colder climes; where here and there in quiet

valleys men and women live in an almost Arcadian simplicity ; yet in their utter ignorance of good and evil have no such words in their vocabulary as honour, truth, or virtue ; while in other isles, perchance as fair to look upon, vice and crime walk rampant, and superstition too dark for words to paint holds mankind in its unholy thrall. He told them how those islands to which he was going, discovered nearly three hundred years ago by a Spanish navigator, had been suffered to languish in outer darkness until now, and how it was his hope and prayer to be their earliest evangelist. He told them briefly of the far greater men who had gone before him, of the saints of old time, who had undertaken such missions in ages when their peril was tenfold, and then lightly touched upon the history of later missions, from the sailing of the Duff downwards.

At the close of that farewell address, there was scarcely one among his hearers, except the miserable girl who loved him with a too earthly love, whose heart was not warmed with some touch of his own heroic passion, and who would not have felt ashamed of a selfish desire to detain him. He seemed created to fulfil the mission he had chosen for himself ; God's fitting instrument for the noblest work that was ever given unto man to do.

Upon Elizabeth's ear the solemn close of that leavetaking sounded like a funeral knell. Would she ever hear his voice again—ever, in all the dreary days to come, feel her heart stirred by those deep-toned accents—ever again look upward to that earnest face, which to-night had a grandeur that was not of the earth, earthly?

Now, perhaps for the first time, she utterly despairs of his relenting—of his turning back to take her to his heart again. He did not need her or her human love. He had so wide a life without her, and beyond her—a life which she could never have shared, since she lacked all the gifts that were needed to open the door of that divine city where he dwelt in an atmosphere of light supernal. Could her feeble aspirations towards things celestial, her wavering faith, have ever enabled her to tread the path he trod? Alas, no! To-night she felt how vast was the distance that divided them; and that, if he had suffered her to attach herself to his career, she would have been nothing but a clog and a hindrance for him. And she felt with exceeding bitterness how easy it was for him to renounce her—for him, whose soul was lifted to the very gates of heaven by those splendid dreams with which she had no sympathy. She thought with miserable self-scorn of her fancy that he would have

found his life unendurable without her ; that she must needs be as necessary to his existence as he was to hers. Poor deluded fool ! she had taken no account of his one supreme ambition when she made that calculation ; she had thought of him only as a weak creature like herself, 'the slave of an earthly passion.

Throughout that eloquent sermon she had hardly taken her eyes from his face ; but not often had his glance shot downwards to the dusky corner where she sat, a white still figure, phantom-like in the uncertain light. His gaze, for the most part, was directed far beyond her, to the mass of shabbily-dressed listeners who crowded the other end of the church, his peculiar flock, those English heathens he had found in the lanes and byways of Hawleigh and its neighbouring villages, some of whom had walked half-a-dozen miles to hear his farewell.

There had been a good deal of quiet crying among the women, but no dramatic or oratorical display of emotion on the part of the preacher. Yet every one felt that he was deeply moved ; that it was not without profound sorrow he bade them such a long good-bye. There was a solemn hush as he came down from the pulpit, and for some breathless moments the people stood motionless, looking after him. Then came a favourite hymn, 'From Greenland's icy mountains,'

a hymn which the congregation sang with faltering voice ; tremulous sopranos among the young-ladyhood of Hawleigh testifying to the esteem in which the Curate had been held. No sound of Elizabeth's voice mingled with that psalmody ; Gertrude sang in a high soprano, with a tremolo which she affected at all times, and the air of a martyr making melody as she marched towards the stake ; and it seemed as if that shrill peal drew Mr. Forde's attention to the Vicar's pew. He looked that way, and saw Elizabeth standing like a statue, with a face as white as her gown.

CHAPTER X.

‘ O last love ! O first love !
 My love with the true, true heart !
To think I have come to this your home,
 And yet we are apart.’

A SLEEPLESS night; a night of tossing to and fro, and mental fever and doubt and uncertainty, half-formed resolves, a long struggle between love and pride; and the early summer light shines on a pale eager face and tired eyes that have been watching for the dawn.

When that laggard morning comes, Elizabeth Luttrell has made up her mind to do something very desperate, very mad perhaps; she does not shrink from confessing as much to herself; but something without doing which she feels she cannot endure her life.

She will see him once more, face to face; hear his voice speaking to her, and her only, once more in their lives; touch his hand, perchance, in friendly farewell, and then resign herself to their inevitable parting.

Of the reversal of that decree, or that any influ-

ence she can bring to bear can make him waver in his purpose, she cherishes no hope. There was that in his speech and manner last night which spoke of a resolve no earthly forces could shake. What could her selfish passion, her narrow love, do against a purpose so high, a scheme that involved the eternal welfare of millions? For who shall assign the natural limits of the missionary's work, or gauge the width of that new world over which his influence shall extend?

No; she deluded herself with no hope that he might be turned aside even at the last moment, by the witchery of her smiles, by the pathos of her tears. She knew now that his world was not her world; that wide as the east is from the west were his thoughts from her thoughts. She hoped nothing, except that he would hear her patiently when she sought to exonerate herself from the charge of inconstancy, or any flagrant wrong against him; hear her while she told him the true history of her acquaintance with Lord Pauly; hear and believe her, and carry away with him at least the memory of a woman who had loved him dearly, and had never wronged him by so much as a thought.

And then they would shake hands calmly, and he would give her his blessing, the blessing of a possible

saint and martyr; and so he would fade for ever from her bodily eyes, leaving only that image of him which she must carry in her heart to the grave.

'I have no pride where he is concerned,' she thought, as she paused to consider how vast an outrage against the conventionalities she was about to perpetrate.

The up-train by which most London-bound travellers of the superior or first-class rank were accustomed to depart from Hawleigh was a nine-o'clock express. She thought it more than probable that Mr. Forde would go to London as the preliminary stage of his journey, and it was just possible that he might go by that train. If she called at his lodgings at eight o'clock, she would secure her desired interview; she knew his early habits, and that he had generally breakfasted and begun his day's work by that hour. Of what Mrs. Humphreys, the carpenter's wife, might say about this untimely visit, she thought nothing; being indeed, at all times, too impetuous for profound consideration of consequences.

She dressed herself quietly while Blanche was still asleep. They had a slip of a bath-room, converted from the oratory of some mediæval châtelaine, on one side of their tower; here Elizabeth made her toilette, and then crept softly out of the bedchamber

without awakening her sister from halcyon dreams of new curates yet hidden behind the curtain of fate. She went down the narrow winding stair, and out by the lobby-door, unseen by so much as a servant; and walked, by field-paths and lanes that skirted the town, towards the tranquil domicile of Mr. Humphreys. She recalled that other summer morning nearly a year ago—good heavens, what a long year!—when she had gone by the same road to make the same kind of unauthorised visit, half in sport and half in earnest, defiant, reckless, eager to do something that would bring light and colour into her monotonous life, and desperately in love with the man she pretended to hold so lightly. Then she had gone to him with a proud sense of her power to conquer and bring him to her feet, as she had sworn to do the night before in the passion of wounded pride. Now she went humbled to the dust, convinced of her insignificance in the plan of his life; only anxious that he should not go away thinking worse of her than she deserved.

The street-door of the Humphreys' abode—radiant in the splendour of newly-polished brassplate and handle—was standing open as she approached. Mrs. Humphreys, engaged in conference with the butcher, occupied the threshold, and paused from her discourse with an astonished air at seeing Miss Luttrell.

That air, that look of surprise, awakened the girl to a sense of the singularity of her untimely visit ; the peril of petty gossip and small rustic scandal in which she stood. She made a feeble attempt to protect herself from this hazard.

‘ Good-morning, Mrs. Humphreys,’ she said with a friendly air. ‘ I have been for a before-breakfast walk round by the common. It is so nice after London. I have a message for Mr. Forde from papa. Do you think he would come down-stairs for a few minutes and hear all about it ? I know he is a very early riser.’

‘ O, Miss Luttrell, what a pity ! leastways if it’s anything very particular. Mr. Forde went away by the mail-train last night.’

‘ He went last night ! ’ Elizabeth repeated helplessly.

‘ Yes, miss. It wasn’t like him to travel of a Sunday evening—after that moving sermon too ; there wasn’t a dry eye in the church, I do believe. But the ship he sails in—the Columbius—leaves Liverpool this afternoon, and there was no help for it. I do hope he’ll have nice weather, poor dear gentleman ! ’ added Mrs. Humphreys with a hopeful air, as if he had been about to cross the Straits of Dover.

This was a death-blow. He had gone away, and

carried with him to the other end of the world the conviction of her faithlessness.

She went slowly homewards, wondering vaguely what she should do with the remnant of her life; how she was to live on for an indefinite number of years, and eat and drink and sleep, and pretend to be happy, now that he had vanished out of her existence for ever. Then a new anger against him was slowly kindled in her breast. How could he have been so hard, so cruel, as to leave her thus: without one last word of compassion and forgiveness, without a line of farewell?

‘He saw me in the church last night,’ she thought, ‘and yet could leave me without one touch of pity. He can boast of the grandeur of his own prospects, the splendour of his own hopes, and he has not one thought for my broken life; he cares nothing what becomes of me.’

She brooded over this unkindness with deep resentment. What right had he to take possession of her soul, and then cast her off coldly to this ‘beggarly divorcement’?

‘What does he imagine will become of me?’ she said to herself. ‘I suppose he thinks I shall marry Lord Paulyn in spite of his warning, and be miserable for ever afterwards. Or does he think I shall

repent my sins and join some Protestant sisterhood; or die broken-hearted because of his unkindness? O, if I could only die! He might be sorry, perhaps, for that; if the news of my death ever reached his distant world; or if he were to come back to this place some day, and find my grave in the churchyard, and discover at last that I loved him well enough to die of his desertion.'

END OF BOOK THE SECOND.

Book the Third.

CHAPTER I.

‘I am weary of my part.
My torch is out, and the world stands before me
Like a black desert.’

THRICE has the corn ripened on the hillsides and in the valleys round Hawleigh ; thrice have come and gone all the pleasant sights and sweet sounds of summer—dog-roses blooming out their bright brief life in the tangled hedgerows ; honeysuckle scenting the mild air of early autumn, and lingering late as if loth to leave the earth it adorned. Thrice have come the snows and rains and general discomforts of winter—the conventional jovialities of Christmas, church decorations, charity-dinners, infant-school festivities, the annual cakes and ale, the slow-passing Lent, while the chilly new-fledged spring flutters its weak wings timidly, like a tender bird too soon expelled from its nest into a bleak world. All the seasons, with their unvarying duties—the same things to be done over

and over again every year—have come and gone three times, and still Gertrude trudges to and fro among her poor, scattering leaflets of consolation in the shape of small gray-paper-covered tracts ; and still Diana embroiders a little and sketches a little, and yawns and indulges her constitutional headache a great deal, and laments languidly that the Luttrells are not a particularly fortunate family ; and still Blanche, the pert and lively, demands of the unanswering skies when Providence is going to do something for the Luttrells.

There have been changes, however, at Hawleigh. One, a dismal change from the warmth and brightness of a comfortable easy-going life to the darkness and blankness of the grave. That good easy man, Wilmot Luttrell, has slipped out of existence almost as easily as he slipped through it. His daughters found him in his study one dark November morning, two years ago, stricken with paralysis and a partial death, from which he was never to recover. He lingered long in this doubtful state, helpless, patient, mild as he had ever been ; was tenderly nursed by the four girls, who had at least agreed in loving their father dearly at the last—had lingered and been conscious of their love and care, until a second stroke made all a blank. From this he never revived, but expired in that dull

sleep, unconscious of the end ; so closing a life which had been as gentle and harmless as a child's.

This loss—a profound affliction itself—was made all the heavier by the fact that it left the four girls a difficult problem to solve in the one all-important question how they were to live. The entire fortune which their father left behind him amounted to about three hundred a year, exclusive of the vicarage furniture, which, in its decrepitude and shabbiness, may have been worth something less than a hundred pounds, and the vicarage plate, worth a hundred more. With this income, and these belongings, the girls had to begin life for themselves. Aunt Chevenix came to the rescue with an offer of a hundred a year from her own purse, and advised that Elizabeth should come to live with her, and the three other girls go abroad somewhere, say Brussels or the south of France, where they could live genteelly and improve their minds, thereby escaping the loss of caste involved in any alteration of their style of living at Hawleigh. But to this they all objected. Elizabeth thanked her aunt for the offer of a home in Eaton-place, but preferred to remain where she was. ‘ You would soon grow tired of me,’ she wrote, ‘ when you discover how dreary a companion I now am. And forgive me for saying it, auntie, but your house was unlucky

to me. I could not reenter it without a feeling of horror.'

Gertrude expressed her gratitude somewhat stiffly; declined to entertain the idea of lifelong banishment for the sake of gentility; hoped that she could more profitably improve her mind by the performance of her duties at Hawleigh than by the cultivation of any new accomplishments at Brussels or Lyons; was not ashamed of any diminution of style or luxury which their altered circumstances might call for; thanked Heaven she could live as contentedly beneath the humblest roof as beneath the loftiest; and farther informed her aunt that, with the consent of her sisters, she had decided on taking one of the small semi-detached villas, with bay windows and nice little gardens, in the Boroughbridge-road. The furniture from the Vicarage, such of it as was adapted to this new abode, they would retain; also the tea-kettle, which was so touching a memorial of all they had lost.

Mrs. Chevenix shuddered as she read these two letters. Her nieces in a semi-detached villa, at thirty-five pounds a year, in a row of other semi-detached villas of the same pattern! What a change from the fine old Vicarage, with its ins and outs and ups and downs, sunny bow windows, magnolia and

myrtle shrouded walls, its quaint old tower, everlasting memorial of ancient splendour, its wide flower-garden and grassy orchard, sloping to the setting sun. What a change! And Gertrude wrote of it as coolly as if it were nothing.

‘I think my poor brother might have left *me* the tea-kettle,’ thought Mrs. Chevenix; ‘it would have been very useful for afternoon tea, and it would have gone back to the girls afterwards.’

She pondered upon Elizabeth’s letter with a deep sigh.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘it is nothing but the truth; the girl is sadly changed. I hardly know if I should be able to do anything for her now. All her animation is gone; and she has acquired a proud reserved manner that would repel any one who was ever so much inclined to admire her. She is handsome still; but she certainly has contrived to render herself as unattractive as it is possible for a handsome young woman to be. Did ever any girl throw away such chances as she has had?’

This meditation was the result of a retrospective glance at affairs during Mrs. Chevenix’s last visit to Hawleigh, in the autumn before her brother’s death. Lord Pauly had been at Ashcombe during that time, and had come frequently to the Vicarage, and

done his best to renew his old intimacy with Elizabeth Luttrell. But to all these friendly endeavours the girl had opposed a dead blank wall of coldness and reserve. Mrs. Chevenix tried to gloss over this uncomfortable aspect of affairs, and to convince the lover that his suit was not yet hopeless ; but it was in vain for the wily matron to soothe and argue. The young man answered her with smothered anger.

‘ There’s no use in talking nonsense, Mrs. Chevenix,’ he said ; ‘ she has not forgotten that parson fellow yet, and I suppose she never means to forget him. What a pity you didn’t let her have her own way and go out with him, and devote herself to the evangelisation of South-Sea islanders ! I wish with all my heart she had gone ; for then I couldn’t have made a fool of myself hanging about here, and exposing myself to the sneers of Hilda Disney and my mother.’

‘ I cannot see that the affair is any business of Miss Disney’s,’ Mrs. Chevenix remarked with some hauteur. How dared that independent young person to cross the woof of her schemes !

‘ Miss Disney has so little business of her own, that she’s obliged to think of somebody else’s,’ replied the Viscount moodily. ‘ Why don’t you bring her to London, ma’am ?’ meaning Elizabeth, and not

Miss Disney. 'You might cure her of this wretched infatuation there. I suppose she has the fellow's photograph, and kisses and cries over it every night.'

'She has a great deal too much self-respect for that kind of thing,' said Mrs. Chevenix, as if she had been inside Elizabeth's brain, and inspected its cellular arrangements.'

It is possible that this suggestion of Lord Pauly's may have had some influence with Mrs. Chevenix when she offered Elizabeth a permanent shelter in Eaton-place. That offer being rejected, she could only shrug her shoulders and resign herself to circumstances. The luxurious ease of her own existence, the scent-bottle and green fan, made a powerful armour against the slings and arrows of other people's bad fortune. If her favourite niece preferred obscure poverty to rank and wealth, she must needs indulge her humour.

'After all, it makes no real difference to me,' she said to herself. 'I only lose the indirect advantage of connection with the peerage. Such an alliance must have given me the *entrée* to the very best society; and I feel that I could have been of the greatest use to a young woman suddenly elevated to such a position. But it is idle to regret the decrees of Providence.'

So Mrs. Chevenix resigned herself to the inevitable, thanked Heaven that she possessed a good cook and a faultless dressmaker, and went her way calmly rejoicing, knowing no weariness of that unvarying round of tea-drinkings and dinner-eatings and at homes which she called good society. But she seldom omitted to search her *Morning Post* for any small record of Lord Pauly's existence that might perchance adorn its columns, and she even went so far as to subscribe to a fashionable sporting newspaper which was more frequently graced by his lordship's name.

Life seemed new and strange to Elizabeth in the semi-detached villa on the Boroughbridge road, strange with a bitter strangeness. A lofty soul should be, doubtless, independent of its earthly dwelling-place. 'My mind to me a kingdom is;' 'Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage.' Very noble sentiments in their way, but not given to the common herd of humanity. Elizabeth's soul was not so lofty as to rise superior to the influences of her habitation. She felt the change of tenement sorely, felt like some lost creature in the square bandboxical rooms, the prim narrow passage with its pert gas-lamp, the steep straight stairs smelling of

copal varnish; almost as ill at ease as some wild denizen of the forest that had been shifted, from the vast cavern where he roamed and rolled at large, to some straitened den in a zoological garden.

And the vicarage furniture, objects which, from old association, these girls loved dearly, how mean and shabby and wobegone that poor old furniture looked in the new smart rooms, with their cheap modern paper-hanging, and trumpery cornices, and sprawling plaster roses in the centre of their ceilings! The old cracked Chelsea shepherd and shepherdess, which had seemed the natural ornaments of the tall narrow wooden mantelshelf in the vicarage drawing-room, had the forlornest air upon the polished marble slab in the new house. Diana's grand piano filled the small back drawing-room, the big old cane-seated sofa blocked the bay-window in the front drawing-room. Nothing fitted into an embrasure, or adapted itself to the shape of the rooms; and it was only when Gertrude brought that inestimable quality which she called her common sense, and which Blanche called her domineering way, to bear upon the subject, and by banishing this article and shifting the other, reduced the rooms to something like order, that they became simply habitable. Graceful, or elegant, or picturesque they never would be.

Had the new tenants been able to buy bright modern furniture, on a toyshop scale, they might have endued the rooms with a certain doll's-house prettiness ; but the salvage from the Vicarage looked what it was, the poor remnant of departed fortune.

There was a room down-stairs, under the back drawing-room, half sunk in the earth, but provided with a small bay-window and a sham marble mantelpiece, and described by the house agent as a breakfast-room. This the Miss Luttrells made their refectory.

'Of course, in a decent house it would be the housekeeper's room,' said Blanche, the day she first dined in this earthy chamber. 'I shall always feel as if we were cheating the servants out of their natural rights by occupying it.'

Thus began their new lives. Every one called upon them, and admired their new abode, and discussed the new Vicar, and sympathised and approved and consoled. And Gertrude pronounced with satisfaction that their social status remained firm as a rock. They had two servants, one an irreproachable parlour-maid, who was never seen without a starched muslin apron, and everything was done in the nicest manner. They had a garden which might have been covered by a good-sized turkey carpet, but which was

laid out in the last approved style: flower-beds of the tessellated-pavement pattern; scrolls and parallelograms, and open-tart designs done in plants of the houseleek and mouse-ear tribes; jam-tart patterns in scarlet geranium and brown leafage, lobelia and petunia, after the manner of the Duchess of Wiltshire's parterre at the Cottage near Havistock. It is astonishing what great effects may be produced in the area of a turkey carpet by a young lady of Gertrude Luttrell's temperament.

‘There is no one more ready to make sacrifices,’ she said complacently. ‘But whatever I have must be of the best.’

To say that Elizabeth lived in this circumscribed home would be to say too much. She existed—as toads have been believed to exist locked in marble, or comfortably niched in a block of coal. Yet not so patiently as these quiescent reptiles did she bear her fate. Her lips were mute, it is true, for she had a scornful impatience of sisterly consolation, but her soul complained perpetually. Like Job, she remonstrated with her Maker, and demanded why she was not permitted to die. All the anguish of this slow dull year had not been enough even to undermine her vigorous young life. There was scarcely the depression of a muscle in the firm round white arms,

no cavernous hollows spoiled her oval cheeks. She was paler than of old; that fugitive colour which had come and gone in such flashes of brightness two years ago was rarely seen now; her eyelids had a heavy look that hinted of sleepless nights; but these were all the outward changes that had been wrought by Malcolm Forde's abandonment and her father's death.

'I never could have believed I loved my father so much,' she said to herself sadly, one dismal December afternoon, when she had taken a lonely walk as far as the road before the Vicarage, and had seen the fire-glow shining through the old-fashioned casement of her father's study. She had stood for a little while looking across the lawn at that cheery glow, with an aching heart, a heart that seemed to ache from very emptiness.

'My little world has vanished like a dream,' she thought, 'the waters have swept over it, and left me standing on a barren rock in a great pathless sea. If I could only die, like papa, and make an end of it!'

Among those pleasing testimonies of the world's esteem which were offered to the sisters at this sad juncture was a ceremonious call from Lady Paulyne and Hilda Disney. The two ladies drove over from Ashcombe one afternoon in the ancient chariot, con-

ducted by a postillion, who had the aspect of a farm-labourer in disguise, but at the same time looked more imposing than a coachman.

Hilda had her customary air of ladylike indifference, but the dowager peered and pryd, and expressed profoundest interest in the affairs of the four sisters.

‘And you really think of remaining in this pretty little house,’ she said with a gracious wonder, peering at them keenly from under her shaggy old eyebrows all the while, and peering especially at Elizabeth. ‘Do you know I’m rather surprised at that. I should have thought this pokey old town would have been insufferable to you all after your loss, and that some nice place abroad would have suited you better, where you could have had a little pleasant English society in the nice inexpensive continental style—Bruges for instance, or Courtrai—I’ve heard there are English people at both those towns; or Dijon, or some retired little German town where things are cheap.’

‘I have duties and pleasures at Hawleigh which I could never have in a Roman-catholic town,’ said Gertrude.

‘There seems to be a prevailing idea that transportation for life is the only remedy for our grief,’

said Elizabeth, not a little contemptuously. 'I wonder our friends don't suggest Norfolk Island or Botany Bay at once. Or, since transportation is abolished, the government ought to erect a special building at Portland or Dartmoor for young women who are left alone in the world.'

The dowager vouchsafed no reply to these impertinent observations, but she gave Elizabeth a look from beneath those bristling penthouses which was not one of supreme affection.

'You haven't asked after my son, Miss Luttrell,' she said, turning sharply upon Gertrude, after rather an awkward pause, during which Miss Disney had looked straight out of the window with an absent air, as if she had been assisting at a visit to cottagers in whose spiritual or temporal welfare she had no personal interest.

'I beg your pardon,' stammered Gertrude, confused by this sharp attack. 'I hope Lord Paulyn is well.'

'He is very well, and I hope he is on the high road to being very happy.'

Blanche, having nothing particular to do, and not feeling herself called upon to sustain any part in the conversation, happened to be amusing herself by the contemplation of Miss Disney. She

saw the fair cold face flush, and the thin lips contract themselves ever so little at this moment.

‘I suppose that means that he is going to be married,’ said Diana; ‘if one may be allowed to hazard a guess.’

‘How quick you young ladies are when marriage is in question!’ replied the dowager graciously. ‘Yes, I have every reason to hope that Reginald has at last made up his mind to settle. It will be such a happiness to me if he can only be induced to give up that horrid racing stud, his place near Newmarket, and his dreadfully expensive stables in Yorkshire; but if he *can’t* be persuaded to so wise a step, he will at any rate be better able to afford to ruin himself. The young lady to whom he is almost engaged is one of the richest heiresses in England. She has not rank, I admit; but the oppression of the income-tax has long since stamped out my Conservative proclivities. I have no prejudices, Miss Luttrell, and can appreciate the grandeur of position attained by a man who began life by wheeling barrows, and could now write a cheque for a hundred thousand pounds without feeling himself any poorer when it had been cleared. That is what I call true nobility.’

‘The barrows or the cheque-book, Lady Paulyn?’ asked Elizabeth.

'The upward progress from one point to the other,' replied the dowager with dignity. 'I am told that Mr. Ramsay, the great contractor, eats peas with his knife, and is somewhat the slave of habit in the matter of not cleaning his nails. But I hope I have a soul above such trivialities. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to welcome Mr. Ramsay's only child as my daughter.'

Having made this announcement, and even deigned to refresh herself with macaroons and cherry brandy (made two summers ago with the dear old vicarage cherries from the orchard Elizabeth loved), Lady Paulyn departed. But not before she had again expressed her wonder that the Miss Luttrells should prefer Hawleigh to a delightful Belgian town, with canals and stiff little avenues, where they might pace to and fro, and sit on benches, unjostled by any vulgar crowd; or such a place as Dijon, which must surely be a most agreeable town for English residents, since the very name had quite a romantic sound. The dowager lingered so long to discuss these points after she had risen to take her departure, that it was dusk when the chariot went jingling off, to the delight of the adjacent villas.

'It was really very good of her to come,' said

Gertrude, watching the departing equipage complacently from the bay-window. 'What a noise that postillion makes! It is a satisfaction to let our new neighbours see we are on visiting terms with the best county people. I trust I am above attaching an undue value to these things; but I do not pretend to be ignorant of their influence.'

'Good of her, indeed!' cried Blanche indignantly. 'Horrid old thing! Anybody could see that she came to crow over Lizzie. Wicked old she-miser! I do verily believe she would like her son to marry the only daughter of Beelzebub if she had plenty of money.'

'What a pity you didn't marry him when you had the opportunity, and keep mamma's pearl necklace, Lizzie!' Diana said, with a yawn. 'It would have been advancement for all of us. And here we are screwed up for life, I suppose, in this pokey little house, instead of having the run of half-a-dozen splendid places.—Ring for tea, Blanche, please. If it were not for the comfort of our early cup of tea, I should be almost tired of life.'

'Almost tired! I have hardly ever ceased to be tired of it since I was seventeen,' exclaimed Elizabeth with infinite scorn.

'Only for one brief bright summer time of love

and hope,' she thought, by way of rider to that contemptuous speech.

She was silent for the rest of that evening, sitting idle in a shadowy corner apart, while the other three clustered round the lamp; Diana and Blanche engaged in elaborate fancy-work, which gave occasion for perpetual discussions about point de Venise, and Sorrento bars; Gertrude absorbed in a pious biography, from which she read stray passages now and then for the edification of her sisters. It was not a lively evening, any more than the rest of the evenings which these young women spent together in the unfamiliar drawing-room, with its lingering odour of size and plaster-of-Paris; but their manner of life seemed to Elizabeth just a little more dreary than usual to-night.

She was meditating upon all she had lost—in love and ambition alike bankrupt; of all the dreams that she had dreamed, from her early visions of pomp and pleasure with some unknown being who should arise out of space, like king Cophetua, at the right moment, and lift her up to the high places of the earth, to her later and more womanly dream of sweet sacrifices made for the man she loved. And she had lost all. Of these much-cherished dreams there had come no fulfilment;

and being older and wiser now, and having lost the faculty of dreaming, there was nothing left her but the dull realities of the waking world as represented by a trim little newly-built villa in the Borough-bridge road.

‘If I had been wiser, I suppose I should have fallen back upon my old ideas of life when Malcolm Forde flung me off, and married Lord Pauly,’ she thought. ‘A word would have brought him back to me. But now even that miserable alternative is lost, and there is nothing left for me but life for ever and ever shut up in this narrow den with my sisters. I might go and live with aunt Chevenix, certainly; but that would be just a little worse. I have lost all taste for the kind of society my aunt is so fond of, and I should have less liberty there than I have here.’

She thought a good deal about Lord Pauly that night—not so much of him individually as of all that he could have given her—the grandeur, the independence, the power; that strong wine of pleasure which, if not happiness, was at least intoxication; that ideal existence among beautiful scenes, or surrounded with all the graces of art and luxury, the very dream of which had been fair enough to brighten her life in days gone by. He had offered

her all these things, and she had rejected them, without a pang, for the love of Malcolm Forde.

‘And how noble a return he made me for my constancy!’ she thought bitterly, with more anger against her lost lover than she had felt for a long time.

After this, she thought very often about the brilliant position she had rejected, and for the first time thought of it with a vague regret. It was in her nature to hold a treasure lightly so long as it lay at her feet, and to appreciate it when it was lost to her. She had scorned the idea of a marriage with Lord Paulyn, while that faithful admirer had shown himself eager and devoted. She wondered a little at her own foolishness now that he was about to unite himself with some one else.

There may have been more excuse, perhaps, for these sordid thoughts in the joylessness of her present existence. Her life was so utterly barren—every morning the beginning of a day which must needs be the repetition of yesterday—the to-morrows stretching before her blank as the pages of an unused memorandum-book.

It is true that she might have occupied herself, like Gertrude, in visiting the sick and poor, since she was gifted with the power of winning their confidence and even their affection. But she avoided

this natural source of lonely spinsterhood with an obstinate aversion. What! go among these people whom she had served for *his* sake? Ally herself with the last new curate, a pale-faced slip of a man with sandy whiskers? Descend to all the trivialities of the district-visiting community now that *his* godlike form no longer moved among that common herd? This was what she could not do.

Even the grave old churches, in which she had sat from her youth upwards, were distasteful to her. Their aspect reminded her too keenly of all she had lost—the good harmless father—the lover she had loved so madly. She seemed to hear the echo of voices that sounded in those stony aisles no more.

The new Vicar was a pompous red-faced man, who very rarely fatigued himself with the litany or lessons, and who read the communion service in a fat voice, as if he had taken the ten commandments under his especial protection, and preached sermons on abstruse doctrinal points over the heads of his flock. The Vicar's wife was young and fashionable, and put the simple Hawleigh folks to shame by the elegance of her attire. She had essayed to patronise the Miss Luttrells, and had told them about the changes she meant to make by and by in that dreadful barn the Vicarage, and

had congratulated them on their transferrence from that ancient tenement to a modern habitation. Diana and this lady got on very well together, but between the Vicaress and Elizabeth there prevailed a quiet antipathy.

It was, doubtless, her own fault that Elizabeth was lonely. Her sisters had their little batches of dear friends, and visited a good deal in a quiet way soon after their father's death, and entertained their acquaintance with afternoon tea; but Elizabeth's soul rebelled against this humdrum sociality; her footsteps refused to tread this beaten track of every-day provincial life. She preferred lonely wanderings in the very teeth of January's north-easters, on the common and in the familiar lanes where she had walked so joyously with her lover in the brief sweet days of courtship.

If she had cherished the faintest hope of his return to her, she might have been patient, she might have endured the weariness of the present, cheered by a fair vision of the future. But she deluded herself with no such hope. She had, on the contrary, a settled conviction that, once having put his hand to the plough, for Malcolm Forde there would be no turning backward. She had lured him for a little while out of his chosen path; but having broken

loose from her feeble snare, he was the very last of men to return to the net.

‘He was always sorry that he loved me,’ she thought, ‘and there was a look of rapture on his face when he preached his farewell sermon, like the joy of a man who has escaped from a great peril.’

They heard no more of Lord Paulyn’s approaching marriage, standing almost alone, so far as Hawleigh proper went, in the proud privilege of the dowager’s acquaintance; but Gertrude and Diana were not slow to retail the news in their morning calls and five-o’clock teas. Miss Ramsay and her possessions were enlarged upon—the husbands and brothers referred to as authorities upon the commercial world—every one having his pet theory as to which Ramsay was the great Ramsay, who had begun by wheeling barrows; one party clinging tenaciously to a certain Peter Ramsay, Son, and Bilge, proprietors of the famous Red Cross steam-packet line; and another pinning its faith to Alexander Ramsay, the great contractor. Fashionable newspapers were watched, but shed no light upon the subject, nor did the local journals give tongue.

‘I don’t believe there’s a syllable of truth in the whole story,’ exclaimed the outspoken Blanche during one of these discussions, from which Elizabeth was

absent. 'I daresay it's all that nasty old woman's invention. Lord Paulyn was desperately in love with my sister Lizzie, and made her ever so many offers. And she, wicked old thing, wants us all to go and bury ourselves in some dead-and-alive Belgian town, where we should be driven mad by the carillon ringing every half-hour from the rickety old church-towers.'

Miss Luttrell reproved her sister severely for the impropriety of these remarks, and the company generally looked incredulous. It was not to be supposed that any reasonable being would believe in Elizabeth's rejection of the Lord of Ashcombe. He might have hung about her a good deal—compromising her by his attentions, to the rupture of that foolish engagement with dear Mr. Forde; but to suppose that he had laid his coronet at her feet—that he had said to her, 'Be mistress of Ashcombe in Devon, and Harberry Castle in Yorkshire, the Grange near Newmarket, and the old family mansion in St. James's-square'—and that she had deliberately rejected him—to believe this was too much for the imaginative power of Hawleigh.

Yet the day came before very long when the eyes of Hawleigh were opened, and the eyebrows of Hawleigh lifted in surpassing wonder.

CHAPTER II.

‘O, the little more, and how much it is,
And the little less, and what worlds away!’

THE four sisters had inhabited the smart little box on the Boroughbridge-road about four months, when Elizabeth’s scanty stock of patience came to an end. Gertrude’s small despotism, Diana’s languors and affections and headaches, she could abide no longer. She was brought so much closer to these evils in that circumscribed abode. She had no hillside orchard whither to flee at any hour of the day or evening, even on cold spring nights, when the young moon was sailing through the clouds, and when Hawleigh had shut its shutters and lighted its lamps for the night, and it would have been an outrage of all the proprieties to go out for a walk; no airy turret, half bedchamber and half sitting-room, where she could read or muse in solitude; only a neat little square bedroom, divided from Gertrude’s by so fragile a partition that its inmates were wont to whisper like conspirators in their vesper talk.

The Vicar's death, too, had given Gertrude a new position in the home circle. She assumed the responsibility of their future life. She had chosen and taken the house, and selected the furniture they were to keep; and regulated the mode and manner of their new life, which friends and acquaintances of the past they were chiefly to cherish, and which they were gently and graciously to let drop. Gertrude kept the purse and the keys, regulated the expenditure, and held possession of the narrow store closets. The younger sisters could hardly order an extra cup of tea without permission, or breakfast in bed perchance on a bleak winter morning without inventing some ailment as an excuse for that indulgence. Diana submitted from sheer laziness.

'I must live with some one who will order my dinner and pour out my tea for me,' she said; 'and it may as well be Gertrude as any one else. I dare-say if I were rich enough to have a confidential maid, she would tyrannise over me.'

One day, towards the end of March, Elizabeth astonished her sisters by declaring her intention of going abroad straightway.

'I shall go over to Dieppe,' she said, 'and wander through Normandy, and then make my way somehow to Belgium—my geographical ideas are the vaguest,

but I shall find out everything when I am there—and then perhaps I shall go up the Rhine; and I don't think I shall come back till the winter. I have been reading up a foreign Bradshaw, and making tremendous calculations about ways and means. O, by the bye, Gertrude, how much have we each to live upon? I know I can manage with it, for I mean to do things in a strong-minded economical way—travelling third-class, and even walking from one town to another when the distances are short; and third-class travelling is dirt-cheap on the Continent. I shall wear no fine washing dresses, nothing more expensive than a linsey gown and a waterproof cloak.'

Until this moment Gertrude had only been able to stare. Even the languid Diana dropped her novel, and looked her astonishment at this wild proposition.

'Are you mad, Elizabeth?' exclaimed the eldest sister sternly; 'or do you mean this for a joke?'

'I am not mad, not a wee bit wud, as the Scotch say'—she had read a little of Burns with her lover—'and I have long left off joking. Pray don't look so unutterably shocked, Gerty. I really mean what I say. What is the use of all this talk about women's rights if one is to be pent up all one's life in a place like this in order to do homage to the proprieties? Hawleigh is killing me by inches. I shouldn't at all

mind dying, but I don't want to die of slow poison ; and my present life is poison to me—worse than infinitesimal doses of antimony.'

'Very flattering to the relatives you live with,' suggested Gertrude with dignity.

'O, I don't mean you ; but this house, Hawleigh, everything. Old Lady Paulyne was right ; we ought to have gone on the Continent. Not to settle down in some prosy old place, as she suggested, but to wander about. People do not half live who live in one place.'

'The roving existence you talk of may be very well for persons of your impatient temperament,' said Gertrude ; 'but for my own part, I could not live without a settled home ; and I believe that Diana and Blanche share my feelings on that point.'

'I'm not quite sure of that, Gerty,' said the intractable Blanche. 'Hawleigh is very well in its way, and we know plenty of people, and are sure to be asked to ever so many croquet-parties in the summer. But I should dearly love roaming about the world with Lizzie.'

'In a linsey gown and a waterproof?' cried Diana incredulously. 'What would you do with all the time you spend before your looking-glass in that case ?'

‘I could get on without a looking-glass if there was something worth living for,’ said the damsel.

‘Do not let us descend to puerilities,’ observed Gertrude, with her air of practical wisdom. ‘Such a mode of life as Elizabeth suggests is quite out of the question. Imagine my sister wandering about alone, in third-class carriages, stopping at second-rate inns, exposing herself to insult from underbred foreigners.’

‘That is only your insular prejudice,’ said Elizabeth. ‘Remember all the nice books we’ve read about lady-travellers—“From Ostend to the Tyrol for a Five-pound Note;” “Third-class Passengers to the Jungfrau;” “Meat-teas and Glaciers; or a Maiden Aunt’s Adventures in Savoy;” and so on. Those books seem all to be written by unprotected females of limited means. Why shouldn’t I get on just as well as other unprotected females?’

‘If you were forty years of age, the idea might be somewhat less preposterous.’

‘Would it? I am sure I feel as if I were sixty. But however that may be, I must positively get away from Hawleigh. The air of the Boroughbridge-road disagrees with me. You must give me my share of our income, Gerty—’

‘Which would be about seventy-five pounds.’

‘Is it really so much as that? I should feel immensely rich on the Continent with thirty shillings a week.’

‘You appear to forget that this house was taken with a view to joint occupation.’

‘You can keep ten pounds a year for my share of the rent and taxes.’

Gertrude argued for an hour, and even Diana took the trouble to remonstrate. But it was in vain that both ladies endeavoured to demonstrate the actual impossibility of such a life as Elizabeth proposed to lead. The girl was inflexible.

‘I am of age,’ she said; ‘and no one has the faintest right to curtail my liberty. I have set my heart upon getting away from Hawleigh. Blanche can go with me if she likes. She and I have always got on very well together; but if she doesn’t like, I shall go alone.’

‘I suppose you forget that you have expectations from aunt Chevenix,’ said Gertrude, as a final argument; ‘and that such a step as you contemplate is likely to alienate her affection for ever.’

‘I have never allowed expectations to stand in my way,’ answered Elizabeth scornfully; ‘and as I can live upon a pound a week, I can afford to be independent of aunt Chevenix.’

Remonstrance being useless, the two elder sisters bewailed their sister's folly in secret. It was a complete disruption of the small household. Blanche elected to follow the fortunes of Elizabeth, agreeing to pay her share of the rent during her absence. The most melancholy point in the whole affair was the diminution of state which this severance would necessitate. One of the two servants—the irreproachable parlour-maid, who wore muslin aprons—would have to be dismissed, now that the cost of her maintenance could be no longer shared by the four sisters. This fact moved both Gertrude and Diana more deeply than the loss of their younger and wilder sisters.

Providence, however, had a care for their interests; and an event was looming in the future which was destined to alter Elizabeth's views, or rather to present her with a more brilliant opportunity of escape from the life that had become obnoxious to her.

She was walking alone one gusty afternoon, about a week after the first discussion of her foreign wanderings, and had rambled farther than usual on the road between Hawleigh and Ashcombe—a road that was little better than a winding lane that meandered through a long valley at the foot of the moor.

following the course of a stream that brawled and babbled over its rocky bed, in the winter swollen to the dimensions of a river, and in dry summers vanished altogether from the eye of man, leaving its bare stony bed to bleach in the sun. The deep banks of the lane were thickly clothed with greenest ferns in the late summer time; but at this season there were only a few violets nestling in the mossy turf, through which the red rich soil of the West peeped here and there in ruddy patches.

This lane was a favourite walk of Elizabeth's. Young oaks and older Scotch firs rose like a forest on one side; the steep shoulder of the moor shut it in on the other. A solitary darksome place, in the chill March dusk, gloomy with Nature's pensive gloom—a very cloister in which to meditate upon the faults and follies of her blighted life.

The boundary of her longest rambles was an old stone bridge about three miles from Hawleigh, at a point where the stream widened and made a sharp curve across the road; a very ancient bridge, covered with gray old mosses and pale sea-green lichens; and supposed to have been built by those indefatigable road-makers the Romans.

Here she lingered this afternoon, resting a little, with her folded arms upon the parapet, watching

the faint pale moon driven wildly through a cloudy gray sky.

‘I don’t suppose I shall be any happier abroad than I am here,’ she said to herself, ruminating upon her new scheme of life; ‘but I shall at least have something to do, and I shall not have so much time for thought if I keep jogging on from one place to another.’

This was the result of all her meditations that afternoon. She looked forward to the change in her existence not with actual pleasure, only with a vague hope of relief.

She had been standing on the bridge about ten minutes, now following the moon till she was lost in a sea of clouds, now watching the water gurgling over the stones, when she heard the approach of a horseman in the quiet lane; some farmer, no doubt. She did not trouble herself to look round; but waited till he should pass before beginning her homeward walk.

He rode briskly enough up to the bridge, then slackened his pace, and rode slowly across; then to her surprise drew rein suddenly on the other side, sprang from his horse, and came towards her.

‘Miss Luttrell, is it really you?’

She turned quickly, her pale face flushing in the

twilight. It was the first time she had ever blushed at his coming.

‘Lord Paulyn!’ she exclaimed; as much surprised by his appearance as if she had been a thousand miles from his domains.

‘I thought I could not be mistaken,’ he cried, holding out both his hands, but only receiving one of hers, and that one given with a reluctant air; ‘but I should never have expected to find you in this wretched lane—alone, too. I—I haven’t seen you since the Vicar’s death, and I ought to have written, I daresay, but I’m not a dab—I mean, I’m a poor hand at penmanship. I should have telegraphed to you to say how sorry I was, only I knew my mother would do all that kind of thing.’

‘Thanks. I don’t think anybody’s condolence is of much use in such cases, however well meant. One loses all one has to love in the world, and one’s friends write polite letters, with quotations from Scripture, which are usually incorrect.’

This with a faint attempt at carelessness, but with tears rising unbidden to her eyes.

‘But you haven’t lost all you love,’ seizing upon the small black-gloved hand, and possessing himself of it in spite of her—‘at least, not all who love you; that is to say, there is one foolish beg-

gar I can vouch for who still loves you to distraction.'

'I am not at all aware of any such person's existence. Let go my hand, please, Lord Pauly ; you are pressing the rings into my fingers.'

'I beg your pardon,' unwillingly releasing it. 'But don't pretend not to know, Elizabeth ; that is too bad. I dare say other fellows have made themselves foolish about you ; but you know who I mean when I talk of loving you to distraction. You know that there never was any man so infatuated as I have been—as I still am, worse luck !'

'About Miss Ramsay, I presume ;' with a chilling air.

'Come, now, Lizzie, don't be absurd. Has my mother been letting out any of her fine schemes for getting me to marry Sarah Ramsay ?—a young woman of thirty, with freckles and sandy hair, and about as much figure as a broomstick. She's to have something like half a million of money, I believe, for her marriage portion ; and a million or two when her father departs this life. My mother picked her up at Torquay in the autumn, and has been trying it on ever since, but without effect. I'm the kind of horse that may be brought to the water, but I don't drink unless I'm thirsty.'

‘Lady Paulyn told me that you were going to be married to Miss Ramsay; that it was a settled thing.’

‘Then she told you an infernal lie.’

A little thrill of pleasure stirred Elizabeth’s heart at this unfilial observation. It was not that she liked Lord Paulyn, or that she was proud of his constancy, or grateful for his affection, or that she had at that moment any idea of marrying him. She was merely pleased to discover that she had not been superseded; that she still retained her dominion over him, still held him in her thrall; that she could go home to her sisters, and tell them how egregiously they had been duped by the dowager’s diplomatic falsehoods.

‘No, Lizzie, I never cared for any one but you,’ the young man went on, after he had muttered his indignation at the dowager’s attempt to deceive; ‘and I suppose I shall go on caring for you to the end of my days. It’s the most miserable infatuation. Do you know that I am tolerably safe to win the Derby this year, with a horse I bred myself; his sire was one of the old Dutchman’s stock, and his dam was sister to Styriax, who won the Two Thousand six years ago, and the Chester Cup the year after? Yes, Lizzie, I think the Derby’s a safe

thing this year ; and yet I set no more value upon it than if it was nothing. Think of that, Lizzie—the blue ribbon of the turf. I've been winning no end of things lately ; yacht races and so on last year, and a cup at Newmarket the other day. It's the old adage, you know : unlucky in love— But I'd rather win you for my wife than half-a-dozen consecutive Derbies. Come now, Liz, it's all off with that other fellow ; he's off the course, the Lord knows where. What is there to stand between us ?'

‘ Merely the fact that Mr. Forde is the only man I ever loved, and I am not quite sure I don't love him still. I owe you at least candour. It is a very humiliating confession to make ; but I do not mind telling you that I loved him very dearly, and that my heart was almost broken by his deserton.’

‘ Confounded snob !’ said the Viscount ; ‘ but I'm very glad he did make himself scarce. It would have been a most unsuitable match ; a splendid girl like you, born to adorn a coronet and all that kind of thing. But I say, Lizzie—’

‘ Who gave you leave to call me by my Christian name ?’ she asked, looking round at him indignantly. She had been staring at the little river hurrying over its rugged bed, hardly seeming to listen to Lord

Paulyn's discourse. He had his horse's bridle upon his arm, and found some hindrance to eloquence in the restlessness of that animal.

'O, come now. It's not much of a privilege to ask, after standing all I've stood for you, and being laughed at by my friends into the bargain. But I say, Elizabeth, I want to talk to you seriously. I only ran down from London by last night's limited mail; and the chief motive that brought me here was the thought that I might find you a little better disposed towards me, when the edge of your feelings about that parson fellow had worn off. You've had time to grow wiser since we met last, and to find out that there's something more in the world than sentimental parsons. By Jove, I should think Hawleigh was a favourable place for reflection; a regular Hervey's-Meditations-among-the-Tombs kind of a place. You've had time to think it all over, Lizzie; and I hope you've made up your mind that you might be happier knocking about the world with me than moping alone here. Be my wife, Lizzie. I've been constant to you all this time, though you always treated me badly. You can't be so hard-hearted as to refuse me now?'

She was slow to answer him, still watching the swift-flowing river, as if she were seeking some

augury in the gurgle of the waters. Even when she did speak, it was with her eyes still bent upon the stream.

‘I know that I am supremely miserable here,’ she said, ‘and that is all I know about myself.’

‘But you might be happier in the world, Lizzie, with me. Who could be anything but miserable moping in such a hole as this?’ demanded Lord Paulyn, with a contemptuous glance at the darkening moorland, as if it had been the meanest thing in nature.

She scarcely heeded the manner of his speech or the words that composed it. She was debating a solemn question; holding counsel with herself. Should she astonish all her friends—prove that she, the rejected of Malcolm Forde, could mount to dazzling worlds beyond their ken? The days of her humiliation had been very bitter to her; she had eaten ashes for bread, and moistened them with angry tears. The fact that she cared nothing for this man, that her chief feeling about him was a sentiment verging upon contempt, hardly entered into her thoughts to-night; they were too exclusively selfish. Self was the very centre of her little world. Her own humiliation, her own disappointments, made up the sum-total of her universe. Whatever

was womanly, or true, or noble in her nature had begun and ended with her love for Malcolm Forde.

An hour ago and she had believed Lord Paulyne as completely lost to her as her father's curate, and she had begun to regret the folly that had cost her all the splendours of that brighter world which had seemed so very fair to her two years ago. And, behold ! here was the constant lover again at her side, again offering her his rank and wealth, not from the haughty altitude of a King Cophetua to his beggar-maid, but urging his plea like a condemned felon beseeching the reversal of his doom.

Busy thoughts of what her life might be in the years to come if she accepted him—busy thoughts of the dull blank it needs must be if she rejected him—crowded her brain. Selfishness, ambition, pride—all the worst vices of her nature—won the victory. She turned to her lover at last, with a face that was very pale in the dim light, and said slowly,

‘If you really wish it, if you are content to take me without any profession of love or sentiment on my side—I made an end of those when I quarrelled with my first lover—if you can be satisfied with such an indifferent bargain—’

‘If !’ cried the young man with sudden energy, putting his disengaged arm round her reluctant

figure, which recoiled involuntarily from that token of appropriation ; ‘that means Yes, and you’ve made me the happiest fellow in Devonshire. The horse that can stay is the winner after all. I always said I’d have you for my wife, Lizzie, and now I shall keep my word.’

From that moment her doom was sealed. There was no looking backward. Lord Paulyn took possession of his prize with the iron hand of some lawless sea-ranger swooping upon a disabled merchantman that had drifted across his track. From that hour Elizabeth Luttrell had a master.

CHAPTER III.

‘Lorsqu'un homme s'ennuie et qu'il sent qu'il est las
De trainer le boulet au bagné d'ici bas,
Dès qu'il se fait sauter, qu'importe la manière?’

ELIZABETH's manner that evening was just a little colder and quieter than usual. No unwonted flutter of her spirits betrayed the fact that the current of her life had been suddenly turned into a new channel. She had suffered her lover to accompany her to the edge of that suburb in which the Borough-bridge-road was situated, and had there dismissed him.

‘I may come to see you to-morrow, mayn’t I?’ he pleaded. He had been trying to make her fix an early date for their marriage all the way along the dusky lane.

‘We must be married and have our wedding-tour over before the Derby, you know,’ he said persuasively. ‘You don’t care much about the touring business, do you? I’m sure I don’t. I never could understand why newly-married people should

be sent to stare at mountains, and do penance in musty old cathedrals, as if they'd done something wicked, and were obliged to work it out somehow before they could get absolution. A week at Malvern would be about opr figure ; or if we had tolerable weather, I could take you as far as Malta in the Pixy.'

' You are in a great hurry to settle matters ; but when I promised to marry you, just now, I said nothing about the date of our marriage.'

' But that goes without saying. I've served my apprenticeship. You're not going to turn round upon me like Laban, and offer me one of your sisters, or make me work seven years longer. And if you have made up your mind to marry me, it can't matter to you whether it's soon or late.'

' What will Lady Paulyn say ?' asked Elizabeth, with a little laugh. There was something pleasant in the idea of that wily matron's mortification.

' My mother will be rabid,' said the dutiful son ; ' but so she would whomsoever I married, unless it was for bullion. It was a good joke her coming to try and choke you off with that story about Sarah Ramsay. Yes ; my mother will be riled.'

' And Miss Disney ? do you think she will be pleased ?'

The Viscount was not so prompt in his answer this time.

‘Hilda,’ he said meditatively; ‘well, I don’t know. But I suppose she’ll be rather glad. It’ll give her a home, you see, by and by, when my mother goes off the hooks. She couldn’t have lived with me if I’d been single.’

‘Of course not. We shall have Miss Disney to live with us, then, by and by?’

‘In the natural course of events, yes; my mother can’t go on nursing the Ashcombe estate till the Day of Judgment, though I’ve no doubt she’d like very much to do it. And when she’s dead, and all that kind of thing,’ continued his lordship pleasantly, ‘Hilda can have an attic and a knife and fork with us, unless she marries in the interim, and I don’t think that’s likely.’

‘She looks rather like a person who has had what people call “a disappointment,”’ suggested Elizabeth, wincing a little as she remembered her own disappointment.

‘She came into the world with a disappointment,’ replied Lord Pauly. ‘Her mother eat the sour grapes, and her teeth were set on edge. Her father, Colonel Disney, was heir-presumptive to a great estate, when my aunt Sybilla married him; but

when his uncle died, six months after the Colonel's marriage, a claimant sprang up with a rigmarole story of a Scotch marriage, and no end of documentary evidence, the upshot of which was, that after a good deal of Scotch law, and pursuing and defending and so on, the claimant—a black-muzzled lad with a dip of the tar-brush—walked over the course, and Hilda's father was left with a large fortune in the hands of the Jews, in the shape of post-obits and accommodation-bills. He ran away with a French opera-dancer soon afterwards, in a fit of disgust with society. My aunt and Hilda were left to drag on somehow upon a pittance which my grandfather, a stingy old beggar, had settled upon his daughter when she married. When my aunt died, Hilda came to live with my mother, and has had a very pleasant time of it ever since, I make no doubt.'

They parted at the beginning of the villas that were dotted along the first half mile or so of the Boroughbridge-road, giving a trim suburban aspect to this side of Hawleigh. There were even gas-lamps, macadam, and a general aspect of inhabitedness very different from the narrow lanes and rugged common on the other side of the town. This new neighbourhood was the west-end of Hawleigh.

'I shall come to see you to-morrow,' repeated

Lord Paulyn, reluctant to depart. 'And mind, everything must be over and done with before May. Do you remember the first Derby we were at together, nearly two years ago? Jolly, wasn't it? I've got a new team for the drag, spankers. I've set my heart upon your seeing Young Englander win. Hadn't you better write to Mrs. Chevenix? She's the woman to do our business. If you trust everything to your sisters, they'll be a twelvemonth muddling about it.'

'We have plenty of time for discussing these arrangements, without standing in the high-road to do so,' said Elizabeth impatiently. 'If I had known you were going to worry me, I should never have said what I did just now. After all, it was only said on the impulse of the moment. I may change my mind to-morrow morning.'

'O no, you won't. I won't stand anything of that kind. I am not like that parson fellow. Once having got you, I mean to keep you. I think I deserve some reward for holding on as I've done. You mustn't talk any more about throwing me over; that's past and done with.'

'Then you mustn't worry me,' said Elizabeth, with a faint sigh of utter weariness. 'So now good-night for the last time. It is past seven o'clock,

and my sisters will think I am lost. I almost wonder they haven't sent the bellman after me.'

And thus they parted, without the kiss of betrothal, which Miss Luttrell would not consent to receive in the high-road. But he had kissed her once in the lane; passionate lips pressed against unwilling lips, typical of that union which was to be no union; only self-interest and selfish short-lived passion going hand in hand.

'O, dear,' thought Elizabeth, as she went in at the little garden gate, and knocked with the doll's-house knocker on the doll's-house door; 'what a tiresome thing it is to be engaged!'

She had thought very differently two years ago, when her willing head rested for the first time on Malcolm Forde's breast, and a supreme contentment, which seemed more of heaven than of earth, descended on her soul—a perfect restfulness, like the serene stillness of a rescued vessel that lies at anchor in some sheltered harbour after long battling with wind and waves.

'How he begins to worry me already,' she thought of her new master. 'I foresee that he will make me do whatever he likes, unless he goes too far and rouses the spirit of opposition in me. But Gertrude and Diana will not be able to crow over me any

longer, that is one comfort. And I have done with small rooms and a small income, that is another.'

Her sisters had drunk tea, and dismissed the urn and tea-pot, and a cold and somewhat sloppy cup of their favourite beverage had been set aside for her on a little tray. She smiled involuntarily, as she threw off her hat, and sat down in a corner to sip the cold tea, thinking how, in a very short time, pompous serving-men would hasten to administer to her wants, and her coming in and going out would be an affair of importance to a vast household. She sat in her corner looking listlessly at her sisters, grouped round the lamp, and engaged in their usual avocations, and could not help feeling that it was really very good of her to endure these small surroundings, even for the moment.

'Where have you been all this time, Lizzie?' exclaimed Blanche, looking up from the construction of some futility in bead-work. 'At the Melvin's, I suppose, kettle-drumming?'

'No; I went for a longer walk than usual, and forgot how late it was.'

'And have been roaming about alone after dark,' said Gertrude, with a horrified look. 'Really, Elizabeth, if you must indulge your eccentric taste for solitary rambles, you might at least respect the

opinion of the world so far as to gratify your strange taste within reasonable hours.'

'I have no respect for the opinion of the world. I have outraged it once, and perhaps may outrage it again.'

'Which way did you go?' asked the pacific Blanche, anxious to change the subject.

'Towards Ashcombe.'

'I wonder when Lord Pauly is to be married,' said Diana, contemplating some grand effect in a square inch of point-lace.

'Rather soon, I believe.'

'Where did you hear that? Come now, you must have been calling somewhere, or you would not have heard the news.'

'I have not been calling anywhere, but I have reason to believe Lord Pauly is going to be married, and rather soon.'

'There's nothing new in that,' said Diana; 'the dowager told us as much.'

'Would you like to be bridesmaids on the occasion, all of you?' asked Elizabeth.

'What, bridesmaids to that horrid Miss Ramsay!' cried Blanche.

'No, not to Miss Ramsay—but to me.'

The youngest and most energetic of the Luttrells

sprang from her seat, very nearly overturning the moderator-lamp in her excitement.

‘To you! O, you darling, have you been cheating us all this time, and are you really going to be a great lady, and present us all at court, and give no end of balls and parties? It’s too good to be true.’

‘And as we had no ground for such an idea yesterday, when you were full of your continental wanderings, I really can’t understand why we are to believe in such a thing to-night,’ observed Gertrude the pragmatical, with a spiteful look.

‘Can’t you? There are some people in whose lives great changes seem to happen by accident. The accident of a wicked anonymous letter helped to break off my engagement with Mr. Forde,’ with a keen glance at her eldest sister. ‘A chance meeting with Lord Pauly this evening on the Roman bridge has altered my plans for going to Normandy. He made me an offer again to-night, for the third time in his life, and—’

‘And you accepted him,’ said Diana. ‘You must have been nearer idiotcy than I should like to think a Luttrell could be, if you rejected him.’

‘But there is such a thing as constancy even to an idea,’ said Gertrude. ‘I should have thought

Elizabeth would have cared more for the memory of Malcolm Forde than for worldly advantages.'

'No,' answered Elizabeth defiantly, 'I am not so slavish as to go on breaking my heart about a man for ever. And living screwed up in this box of a house has taught me the value of surroundings.'

'You will go to live at Ashcombe, I suppose,' suggested Gertrude, 'with the dowager and Miss Disney? I can fancy how nice that will be for you.'

'I shall do nothing of the kind. I mean to live in the world, in the very centre of the great whirlpool—to go spinning round perpetually in the fashionable maelstrom.'

'A hazardous life for the welfare of an immortal soul,' said Gertrude.

'I have ceased to care for my soul since Malcolm gave me up. Indeed, I have a suspicion that my soul ceased to exist when he went away, leaving only some kind of mechanism in its place.'

CHAPTER IV.

Hoyden. This very morning my lord told me I should have two hundred a year to buy pins. Now, nurse, if he gives me two hundred a year to buy pins, what do you think he'll give me to buy fine petticoats?

Nurse. O, my dearest, he deceives thee foully, and he's no better than a rogue for his pains. These Londoners have got a gibberish with 'em would confound a gipsy. That which they call pin-money is to buy their wives everything in the varsal world, down to their very shoe-ties.'

UNBOUNDED was the rapture of Mrs. Chevenix when she received the unlooked-for tidings of Elizabeth's engagement. She wrote at once urging that the wedding should take place in London. 'It will be just the height of the season,' she said, 'and everybody in town. Gertrude, Di, and Blanche can come up with you. I will stretch a point, and find rooms for all of you. You could not possibly be married from that footy little house in the Borough-bridge-road. And there will be your trousseau, you know, dear, a most serious question; for of course everything must be in the highest style, and I really

doubt whether Cerise—whose real name, by the bye, I have lately discovered to be Jones—is quite up to the mark for this occasion. She suits me very well, but I have lately discovered a want of originality in her style ; so I think the better way would be to order your superior dinner and evening dresses from Paris, and give Cerise only the secondary ones. Believe me, my dear child, I shall not shrink from expense, but we will not fall into that foolish trick of ordering more dresses than you could wear in six months, ignoring the almost hourly changes of fashion. As Lord Paulyn's wife, you will, of course, have unlimited means. By the way, as you have really no responsible male relative, the arrangement of settlements will devolve upon me. My lawyers, Messrs. Pringle and Scrupress, are well up in that kind of work, and will, I am sure, protect your interests as carefully as if you were the daughter of their oldest and most important client.'

This subject, thus mooted for the first time in Mrs. Chevenix's letter, was destined to cause a good deal of argument and unpleasantness between the aunt and niece.

'I will have no settlement,' said Elizabeth resolutely. 'I take nothing to him, except sixty or seventy pounds a year, and he shall not be asked to

settle ever so many hundreds upon me. I will not *quite* sell myself. Of course, he will give me fine dresses and all I can want to make a brilliant figure in his own world. He has been patient enough and devoted enough for me to trust my interests to him. It stands to reason that I shall always have as much money as I can spend. He is overflowing with riches, and as his wife I shall have a right to my share of them. But I will not allow any one to ask him to name the price that he is willing to give for me. It shall not be quite a matter of buying and selling.'

'Very high-flown notions, and worthy of the most self-willed unreasonable young woman that ever lived,' exclaimed Mrs. Chevenix in a rage. 'But I suppose you would hardly wish your children to starve. You will not object to *their* interests being provided for by people who know a little more about life than you do, self-opinionated as you may be.'

'My children!' said Elizabeth, turning very pale. Could there be children, the very sanctification and justification of marriage, for her and for Reginald Paulyn, who in marriage sought only the gratification of their own selfish and sordid desires? 'My children! I can hardly fancy that I shall ever hear a voice call me mother. I seem so unfit to have little children loving me and trusting in me, in their blind

childish way,' she added dreamily; and then, with a more practical air: 'Do what you please to protect their interests, auntie, in case Lord Paulyn should gamble away all his wealth on the racecourse; but remember, for me myself not a penny.'

Nor was this an idle protest. She took care to give the family solicitors the same injunctions; and as Lord Paulyn was not a man to insist on extreme generosity in the preliminary arrangements of his marriage, he did not dispute her will. So certain estates were settled upon such younger sons as Elizabeth might hereafter bring to her husband, and certain smaller properties were charged with the maintenance of daughters; but the wife herself was left subject to the husband's liberality. Mrs. Chevenix shook her head ominously.

'Was there ever anything so foolish? After what we have seen of that old woman too!' she added, with somewhat disrespectful mention of her niece's future mother-in-law.

Their knowledge of the dowager was certainly not calculated to inspire any exalted hope of the son's generosity. Yet, in that foolish period which went before his marriage, Reginald Paulyn showed himself lavish in the gifts which he showered upon his mistress. Did she but frown, he propitiated her

with an emerald bracelet ; was she angry with him without reason, she had her reward in a triplet of rings, red, white, and green, like the Italian flag. The Paulyn diamonds, which had lain *perdu* since the dowager's last appearance at court, were dug out of the bank, and sent to be reset at a famous West-end jeweller's. Elizabeth beheld their far-darting rays with dazzled eyes, and a mind that was almost bewildered by this fulfilment of all her childish dreams. It was like the story of Cinderella ; nor does one know by any means that Cinderella cared very much about the Prince. The old fairy tale is hardly a love story, but rather a romance of horses and carriages, and other worldly splendour, and swift transition from a kitchen to a palace.

‘ After all, it was perhaps very lucky that Mr. Forde jilted me,’ Elizabeth thought in her worldly-minded moments, when she was taken to look at the carriages which Lord Paulyn had chosen for her. The graceful shell-shaped barouche, the dainty brougham, with innumerable patent inventions for the comfort of its occupant.

There had been no Paulyn town-house since the reign of George III., when Reginald's grandfather had inhabited a gaunt and dismal mansion out Manchester-square way, the freehold of which had

been settled upon a younger son, and had, in due course, been forwarded to a money-lender. The dowager, in her day, had preferred living in furnished lodgings during her residences in the capital. So Elizabeth had the delight of choosing an abode at the West-end, and finally, after exploring all the more fashionable quarters, selected a corner house in Park-lane, all balconies and verandahs, with a certain pleasing rusticity.

‘You must build me a huge conservatory on the top of that hideous pile of stabling and kitchens at the back,’ she said to her lover, to whom she issued her orders somewhat unceremoniously at this period of their lives; ‘and I must have a fernery or two somewhere.’

The selection of furniture for this balconied abode was an agreeable amusement for Miss Luttrell’s mornings during the few weeks she spent in Eaton-place, and was not without its effect upon the balance Lord Paulyn kept at his bank, which was an unusually small one for so wealthy a customer. The young lady showed a marvellous appreciation of the beautiful in art, and an aristocratic contempt for all questions of cost. She had her pet forms and colours, her caprices upon every subject, the gratification whereof was apt to be expensive.

‘She’s like Lady Teazle, by Jove,’ grumbled the Viscount, opening his heart to a friend in the smoking-room of his favourite club, after a long morning at Kaliko’s, the crack upholsterer; ‘spends a fellow’s money like water; and, by Jove, I feel sometimes inclined to growl, like the old buffer in the play.’

‘Shaw to be so,’ said his friend, ‘if a feller marries a poor man’s daughter. They always make the money fly like old boots; haven’t been used to it, and like to see it spin; just like a child that spins a sovereign on a table.’

‘If she were always to go on like this, she would be the ruin of me,’ murmured Reginald ruefully; ‘but of course it’s only a spirt; and if she were inclined to do it by and by, I shouldn’t let her.’

‘Of course not. You’ll be able to put on a stiffish curb when once she’s in harness.’

This capacity for extravagance exhibited by his future wife gave Lord Paulyn subject for some serious thought. Even that refusal of a settlement, which, at the first glance, seemed so generous an impulse upon the part of Elizabeth, now assumed an alarming aspect. Might she not have refused any stated pin-money simply because she intended to put no limit upon her expenditure? She meant

to range at will over the whole extent of his pastures, not to be relegated to an allotted acreage, however liberal. She meant, in fact, to do her best to ruin him.

‘But that’s a matter which will easily adjust itself after we are married,’ he said to himself, shaking off the sense of wild alarm which for the moment had possessed him. ‘I won’t have my income made ducks and drakes of even to please the handsomest woman in Europe. A town-house once bought and furnished is bought and furnished for our lifetime, and for our children and grand-children after us; so a little extravagance in that line can’t do much harm. And as to milliners, and all that kind of thing, I shall let her know as soon as possible that if her bills go beyond a certain figure, she and I will quarrel; and so, with a little judicious management, I daresay I shall soon establish matters on a comfortable footing.’

So for these few weeks, her last of liberty, Lord Paulyn suffered his betrothed to have her own way—to have her fling, as he called it himself. Whatever her eye desired, as she roved at large in Kaliko’s treasure-chambers, was instantly booked against her future lord. The rarest Sèvres; the most exquisitely-carved ebony cabinets, inlaid with

plaques of choice old Wedgewood; easy-chairs and sofas, in which the designer's imagination had run riot; fairy-like coffee-tables; inimitable what-nots; bedroom furniture in the ecclesiastical Gothic style, unpolished oak, with antique brazen clamps and plates—furniture that might have been made for Mary Stuart, only that it was much handsomer than anything ever provided for that hapless lady's accommodation, as witness the rickety old oaken bedstead at Holyrood, and King James's baby-basket; carpets from Elizabeth's own designs, where all the fairy ferns and wild-flowers that flourish in Devonian woods bestrewed a ground of russet velvet pile.

Of such mere sensuous pleasure, the rapture of choosing pretty things for her own possession, Elizabeth had enough in the days before her marriage. She was almost grateful to the man whose purse provided these delights. Perhaps if she could have quite put Malcolm Forde out of her thoughts, exiled his image from her mind for ever and ever, she might have been actually grateful, and even happy, in the realisation of her pet day-dream.

She had asked after her friends of the Rancho when she first came to London, but found that hospitable mansion had disappeared, like Aladdin's palace when the Emperor of China looked out of

the window and beheld only empty space where his parvenu son-in-law's residence had stood. The Cinqmars had been ruined somehow; no one—at any rate not any one in Mrs. Chevenix's circle—seemed to understand how. Mr. Cinqmars had been bankrupt, his name in the papers as journalist, stockbroker, theatrical manager, wine merchant—goodness knows what; and the Rancho estate had been sold by auction, the house pulled down, the umbrageous groves on the landward side ravaged by the axe, the ground cut up into shabby little roads of semi-detached villas leading to nowhere. The lawn and terrace by the river had been preserved, and were still in the market at a fabulous price.

‘And what became of Mr. and Mrs. Cinqmars?’ asked Elizabeth, sorry for people who had been kind to her, and surprised to find every one more interested in the fate of the domain than in its late tenants.

Mrs. Chevenix shrugged her shoulders.

‘Goodness knows. I have heard that they went to America; that they are living in a cheap quarter of Paris, Mr. Cinqmars speculating on the Bourse; that they are in Italy, Mrs. Cinqmars studying for the operatic stage. There are ever so many dif-

ferent stories afloat about them, but I have never troubled myself to consider which of the reports is most likely to be correct. You know they really never were friends of my own choosing. It was Lord Pauly's whim that we should know them.'

'But they were very kind and hospitable, auntie.'

'Ye-es. They had their own views, no doubt, however. Their interest was not in Elizabeth Luttrell, but in the future Lady Pauly. The best thing you can do, Lizzie, is to forget that you ever knew them.'

This was not a very difficult achievement for Elizabeth, whose thoughts rarely roamed beyond the focus of self, except in one solitary instance.

Upon the details of Elizabeth Luttrell's wedding it is needless to dwell. She was not married before the Derby day, anxious as Lord Pauly had been to anticipate that great British festival, but early in the flowery month of June, when the roses were just beginning to blow in the poor old vicarage garden—as Elizabeth thought with a sudden pang when she saw the exotics that decked her wedding breakfast. The marriage was, as other marriages, duly recorded in fashionable newspapers; and Mrs. Chevenix took care that etiquette should not be out-

raged by the neglect of the minutest detail, by so much as a quarter of an inch on the wrong side in the depth of the bride's Honiton flounces, or a hackneyed dish among the entrées at the brea kfast.

So these two were made one, and went off together in the conventional carriage-and-four from Eaton-place to Paddington Station, en route for the Malvern Hills, where they were to moon away a fortnight as best they might, and then come back to town in time for Ascot races.

Now—these chapters being purely retrospective—comes the autumn of the fifth year after Mr. Forde's farewell to Hawleigh.

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